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NEW YORK BILL, THE DODGER.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.



BILL, PUTTING HIS HEAD THROUGH A BROKEN WINDOW, LOOKED OUT AT THE STARRY NIGHT
"ARE YOU ALIVE, SIM?" HE CALLED OUT,

New York Bill, THE DODGER; OR, Two Boys Who Were 'Boanced.'

BY EDWARD WILLET,
AUTHOR OF 'WIDE-AWAKE GEORGE, THE BOY
PIONEER,' ETC., E. C.

CHAPTER I.

A DROP AND A SMASH.

A BOY of fifteen was napping it in the emigrant car of a railway train that was speeding across the State of Illinois.

He was not at all an ill-looking young fellow, as he slept there, with his head uneasily reclining in a corner, and his mouth wide open. He had light hair and a clear complexion, and did not look as if he had been extravagantly fed. His clothes, common in quality, were rusty and worn.

Suddenly he awoke, startled out of his sleep by some bad dream, or a severe jolting of the car. Then it could be seen by the dim light of the railway lamp, that he had a bright face, and was quick and alert in his motions.

"Where's Uncle Amos?" he muttered, as he rubbed his eyes and looked at the empty seat by his side.

He got up and went through the car, peering closely at all the men who were awake and asleep. Then he came back, looking rather disconsolate.

"I'd like to know what has become of Uncle Amos," he said, as he resumed his seat.

A boy stepped up and took the empty seat at his side. He seemed to be somewhat older than the lad who had lost his "Uncle Amos," perhaps a year or so older. At least, he had an older look on his face. His clothes were ragged, and his general appearance was that of a street vagabond. But he had a pleasant face, in spite of his snub nose, and he spoke kindly to the younger boy.

"Was you lookin' fur the man who set here?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the other, "and I can't find him."

"I guess you won't see him no more."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I heerd him tell my man, a while ago, that he was goin' to drop you, and he got off a station or two back, and he didn't git on ag'in. I guess you're dropped."

"Drop me!" exclaimed the bereaved boy. "Drop me! I reckon he had better look out what he's droppin'. If I'd known he had any such notion as that, I'd ha' dropped him mighty sudden."

"Sted o' that, he got the drop on you. Is he your dad?"

"No; he is my Uncle Amos. He told me that he had got tired of keepin' me, and was goin' to take me West, to my Uncle Ephr'im. So we started, and here I am."

"He told my man that he guessed he had

took you about far enough, and would go back and let you slide on. He said that my man might have you if he wanted; but my man laughed and said he'd got boys enough to 'tend to. What's your name, bub?"

"Sim Brattle, and I came from C'natta. What's yours?"

"Bill Yards."

"That's a jolly queer name."

"Yes; it makes a feller think of Bill Pool, who was shot."

"Was your daddy called Front Yards, or Back Yards?"

"I guess he must ha' been called Stock Yards as he was a butcher. But he's dead long ago, and I don't belong to nobody. I was took up in New York by some sort of a 'ciety, and they sent a lot of us boys West to grow up with the country. They meant to play me off on the farmers, as if the farmers don't have a hard enough time! But, I dropped my man where your uncle dropped you. I got off the train with him and the rest of the boys, but sneaked around the car, and jumped on ag'in, jist as it started. I guess my man ain't frettin' his life out about it, though."

"What's his name?" added Sim Brattle.

"His name is Quigg, and he's a pig."

"That's a rhyme. What's his business?"

"He said it was Phil—that's the fust name. The second was a woman's name—yes, it was Ann;—Phil Ann—the rest of it was Dutch, I guess."

"You don't mean to say, Bill, that he was a philanthropist?"

"That's the name. Ain't it a whopper?"

"It's lucky that you dropped him. I have heard that those chaps are mighty rough with boys when they git their clamps on them. Where are you goin' now?"

"As far as these cars will carry me."

"What will you do when you git there?"

"If we fetch up in St. Louis, as I guess we will, I can find shoes to black and papers to sell jist the same as in New York."

"But I don't know how to black shoes and sell papers," demurred Sim.

"Oh, it's easy enough to learn. I'll put you up to all the dodges."

"I will go with you, then, Bill, as far as you go."

On this point the conductor had something to say. He soon passed through the car, and asked the two boys for their tickets. As they had none, they stared blankly at him and at each other.

But they must show their tickets, the conductor told them, or pay their fare.

Sim Brattle explained that he had been with his uncle, who had got off the train, leaving him aboard. Bill declared that he had been in charge of a man who had similarly disappeared.

"I see how it is," said the conductor. "You"—addressing himself to Bill—"were with those five boys who were brought from New York to Illinois, and you have given your party the slip. You"—turning to Sim—"I judge to be in the same kind of a scrape. I suppose I ought to send you back; but you may go on as far as you pay."

"Our fares was paid once," declared Bill.

"Where to? Not as far as this, I'll be bound. You must shell out, youngsters, or I shall drop you at the next station."

They jammed their hands into their empty pockets, and the conductor went on.

"This drop game is gittin' played onto us a leetle too often," protested Bill.

"What will we do when he drops us?" asked Sim.

"Dunno yet. Somethin' will happen, of course; so we'll wait fer the fun."

The "fun" came all too soon. Almost as he spoke there was an unusually heavy jolt, that startled the whole train; then a noise of something cracking and breaking, and then a rapid thumping of car wheels over ties, all mingled with shouts and screams from the forward cars.

"Hold on, Sim!" warned Bill. "The breechin' is broke, sure's you're a sinner!"

Then the car the boys were in followed the others down a steep embankment, rolling over twice before it reached the bottom.

The darkness, the crash of breaking glass and wood and iron, and the general wreck and whirl, in which everything movable, themselves included, was dashed and tumbled about, left the two lads nearly out of their wits when the bottom of the embankment was reached.

Bill Yards was the first to move and feel about him. The car, broken in the middle and with its trucks gone, had finally rested on the remains of its floor, and Bill, putting his head through a broken window, looked out at the starry night.

"Are you alive, Sim?" he called out.

"Yes, but mighty close squeezed. Can you git out?"

"Easy as rollin' off a log."

"Roll off, then, and I'll foller as soon as I can git my foot loose."

In a few minutes the boys were free from the car, and standing by the wreck, shaking their legs and feeling of their bruised bodies.

"Anythin' bu'sted?" asked Bill.

"No; but I feel as though I'd been through a board mill."

"And I feel as if I'd tackled a thrashin' machine."

"There's plenty wuss off than us, though, Bill."

No doubt of that. The engine, baggage-car and three passenger-cars were huddled together at the bottom of the ravine, a smoking mass of ruins, from which came cries of pain and piteous appeals for help. The car next to them began to blaze, and they hurried toward the light.

Agonizing cries came from a point of wreckage near the blaze, and Sim Brattle jumped up on the broken car, that was lying on its side, and looked in at the shattered window. There he saw the face of a woman, distorted by fear and pain.

"Help!" she shouted. "The car is on fire, and we will soon be burned to death!"

"Fetch a rock, Bill!" shouted the lad.

Bill Yards brought a heavy stone, and climbed up to his friend, who cleared the broken glass from the window, and reached down.

"Take out my child first!" begged the woman, and Sim then saw the face of a girl, which had been hidden from him by the shadow.

"All right, missis," he said. "We'll do our best. See if you can fetch her a shove, down there."

The "child" proved to be a nearly grown girl, and it was pretty hard tugging for the boys to pull her out of the empty car; but they succeeded, and landed her on the ground, where she seemed to be safe and sound.

Then they turned their attention to the woman, but this was a more difficult matter, as she was jammed in by the wreckage, and the opening was not large enough to allow them to get at her.

But the fire was burning briskly, and there was no time to be lost.

Bill Yards seized the stone, and smashed in the partition between two windows, and his companion jumped down into the mass of tangled seats and broken timber.

Bidding the imprisoned woman wait a moment, he worked his way toward the advancing fire, and in spite of the heat broke off a bit of blazing wood, by the light of which he examined her position.

Perceiving that she was fastened down by a broken seat, he pulled it away, exerting all his strength, and she was free; but she was still unable to move, and said that she feared her leg was broken.

Sim told his friend to bring the girl to help, and she was lifted to the side of the car.

Then, with one to lift and two to pull, the woman, who was not very heavy nor entirely helpless, was got out of the car, and Sim Brattle followed her, just as the flames broke out behind him.

After considerable difficulty they carried her away from danger, and laid her safely on the turf, out of the reach of the burning wreck.

Then they saw that she was a handsome, young-looking woman, with a pale and patient face, plainly but neatly dressed. The "child" had even more than her mother's beauty, and her clear complexion, large blue eyes, and bright golden hair showed to good advantage in the starlight.

"That was a close call, missis," said Bill Yards.

"We owe our lives to you," replied the suffering woman, "and I will never forget the debt, though I am not able to pay it. What is your name?"

"Bill Yards, ma'am."

"And yours, my young friend?"

"Sim Brattle."

"I am Mrs. Ames, and this is my daughter Amy. I shall never forget your names, and I hope I may meet you again, and prove to you that you are not forgotten."

"That's all right, ma'am. Now, we must go and see if there's anythin' more we can do."

As they turned to go, the girl Amy seized Sim's hand, raised it to her lips, and kissed it, while her tears rained upon it.

CHAPTER II.

AN ORPHAN FOR ADOPTION.

THERE was plenty to be done, but by this time there were many people doing it. Those

who had not been injured had hastened to assist those who were confined in the wrecked and burning train. Ill news flies swiftly, and people had hurried to the spot from the surrounding country, with lanterns and tools. The blazing cars also furnished light, and everybody worked with a will, and soon all was done that could be done by those on the spot.

On the ground were laid a number of mangled victims of the collision, some of them screaming, others groaning, and others enduring their pain in silence. Elsewhere lay several others, silent and motionless, who would never scream, or groan, or feel pain any more.

As the two lads moved about the wreck, Sim Brattle picked up a medium-sized black sachel, of thick leather and very heavy.

At the same time they heard an old man, in a group just ahead of them, crying over a loss.

"It was a black sachel," he said, "pretty heavy, but of no value to anybody but the owner, and I will give a fine reward for it. Oh, it can't have been burned!"

"What sort of a sachel was yours, mister?" asked Sim, concealing his find behind him as he stepped forward.

The old man described it, and the boy handed it over to him. He seized it eagerly, and at once examined it, to make sure that it had not been opened.

"Heaven will bless you, my young friend," he said. "There is nothing in it but some iron castings, but they are useful to me. Come to my place—Cornelius Corum, No. — North Second street, St. Louis, and you shall have a fine reward."

"There was money in that sachel, and we may whistle for a reward," muttered Sim, as the old man hobbled away, hugging the sachel under his arm.

Intelligence of the disaster had been flashed over the wires, and soon a train reached the wreck, bringing physicians, stretchers, blankets, bandages, and other help for the wounded. All were got on board, including the dead, and the train slowly moved toward the nearest station at which the wounded could be attended to.

The two lads helped themselves to a comfortable seat in a first-class car, and were not again asked for their tickets. It was sufficient that they were survivors of the disaster.

"Mighty lively time, that," remarked Sim.

"It wasn't nothin' shorter," replied Bill. "But that conductor got cheated out of a chance to drop us. I say, Sim, what a pretty girl it was that we pulled out of the car."

"Pretty!" exclaimed Sim. "She was just lovely. What a sweet name, too—Amy Ames!"

"Yes; I mean to remember that name."

"You may bet your last button that I won't forget it."

"You didn't make much of a spec, Sim, out of that old man and his sachel."

"The durned skink! I am sure there was money in that sachel, and he didn't give us a cent."

"He said he would give you a fine reward, Sim."

"Yes, he said so; but the cash down would ha' suited me better. I mean to remember his

place in St. Louis, and we may worry him some before we're through with him."

"Tell you what, Sim, I give in that I've been sorter picked up in you. I took you fur a greeny at fust; but I guess your head is about as level as a railroad track."

"I hope it is, Bill. Level heads are what we need to have about this time."

After various delays the train rolled into the Union Depot at St. Louis at a late hour in the morning. News of the disaster had preceded it, and newspaper reporters were ready to receive the surviving passengers.

"Say, mister, ain't you goin' to interview us?" asked Bill, stepping up to a young man who carried a note-book.

"Were you on the wrecked train? Give me your names, then."

"Mine is Willyum Yards, Esquire, of New York."

"Mine is Sim Brattle, Esquire, of C'natta."

"All right," said the reporter.

"Ain't you goin' to interview us, mister?" demanded Bill.

"I believe I will let you off this time."

"Go ahead, then, smarty, and buzz the big boys who don't know nothin'. Say, Sim, what are we 'goin' to do for breakfuss? I've got plenty o' brass, but not a speck o' tin."

"You're welcome to what I've got, as long as it lasts," replied Sim. "But we don't have to spend money for fodder jest yit. Come along!"

He marched up to a railway official, to whom he told a pitiful tale of the misfortunes and losses of himself and his friend on the wrecked train, and received an order on a neighboring restaurant, where the two lads breakfasted sumptuously.

"Now we will even up," said Sim, when they could eat no more, and he divided with his friend a small stock of silver and coppers.

"What are you 'goin' to do now?" asked Bill.

"I mean to take in this town, and see if I'd care to buy it."

"I feel as if I owned it a'ready, after that breakfuss. I guess I will go down on 'Change and look inter the blackin' and paper sellin' business."

"I will look around among the airystuckup-racy. Perhaps I may light on some rich old chap who wants to adopt a norfin. Where shall we meet, Bill?"

"I guess this is as good a place as any. Six o'clock this evenin'."

"Kerect! I will consult my cornometer."

"Oh, git out! You put on more airs than a dandy ducky at a cake walk."

Sim Brattle did not take a course that would lead him to the business portion of the city, but turned toward the south, and soon found himself in a broad street that was lined with elegant residences.

After wandering about in this region until he began to believe that he was wasting time and shoe leather, he turned back.

He soon perceived that he was followed by a man whom he had seen looking at him sharply, and he loitered along, to give this shadow a chance to go by.

The man passed him, but turned after going a

few steps, and faced him. Sim then noticed that he was a small, slim, middle-aged man, well dressed, and with a dried-up appearance that made him look much older than he was.

His actions were singular; but it was broad daylight in a public street, and the lad felt that he need not be afraid of any little, withered old man.

"Say, mister," said Sim, "you look as if you'd lost somebody. Maybe I'm the party."

"Perhaps you are," replied the man, with a grin that wrinkled up his withered face. "Do you belong in St. Louis?"

"Not yet, anyhow. I've just got in from C'natta."

"From where?"

"From C'natta. Don't you know C'natta? Big hog town—the Paris of Ameriky."

"Oh, Cincinnati. That is a fine city. Have you any relations or friends here?"

"I hain't got nobody nor nothin', except one pardner, who came on the train with me, and he's a young gen'leman from New York."

The old gentleman rubbed his hands, and puckered up his face with another grin.

"So nobody knows you here," he said. "Ah! that is quite satisfactory. You wonder why I take such an interest in you, my young friend. The truth is that you look remarkably like a boy I once knew, who was very near and dear to me. Indeed, you are his exact image, and I could not help looking at you and speaking to you. You will do me a great favor if you will go with me to my home, which is not far from here, and let me present you to my wife, who will be very glad to see you."

Sim Brattle reflected. He was almost convinced that he had found the rich old gentleman who wanted to adopt an orphan. This was just the chance he had been looking for; but the suddenness of it upset him, and he paused, as he would have said, to let his head settle.

"You need not be afraid of me," said the old man. "I am Augustus Ames, well known here, and I live in a fine house of my own on Chouteau avenue. I have no wish to harm you."

"I ain't a bit scared," replied Sim—"make no mistake about that. I say, though, mister, you ain't a philanthropist, are you?"

"A philanthropist? Oh, no; it is as much as I can do to attend to my own business."

"You're my style, then. Lead on, my noble duke!"

CHAPTER III.

A CROOKED TRANSACTION.

MR. AUGUSTUS AMES had spoken the truth about his residence. He stopped at an elegant house, led the lad up the high and broad steps, and opened the door with a latch-key.

Sim Brattle stared as he entered the spacious hall, and opened his eyes yet wider when he was conducted through a suite of parlors, richly furnished, into a room that was lined with book-cases filled with books in costly bindings.

Here he was seated in a cushioned arm-chair, and Mr. Ames requested him to remain a few minutes, until Mrs. Ames could be informed of his arrival.

"Don't worry about me, old gen'leman," replied Sim; "I'm comferble."

Mr. Ames went out, but soon returned, followed by a lady who seemed to be considerably younger than he, but who was so large and fat that she was a strange contrast to her dried-up little husband. Her hair was black, and her face was very red, and she wore a suit of heavy and showy satin.

"Julia, my love," said Mr. Ames, as his wife settled down upon a sofa, "this is the boy whom Providence has sent to us. Is he not the exact image of our dear Arthur?"

"He is very dirty," replied the lady, looking at him closely.

This remark put Sim on his mettle.

"I guess you'd be dirty, too," said he, "if you'd been tumbled down a steep bank, and smashed up in a railroad train like I was last night. The boy that stood on the burning deck wasn't a patchin' to that."

"Were you in that fearful disaster?" she asked.

"You just bet your breastpin that I was."

"You are right, Augustus. This boy is strikingly like our dear Arthur. I think he will do."

"Of course he will do," said Mr. Ames. "The resemblance is nearly perfect. He will have to do, anyhow, as it is neck or nothing with us now."

Sim Brattle was curious to know what all this meant.

"What's the mix?" he asked. "Have I turned out to be anybody's long lost son? Do I need to find a strawberry mark upon my left arm?"

"He's sharp enough, Julia," said Mr. Ames. "Decidedly I think he will do."

"You had better explain to the boy what is wanted of him, then," suggested his wife.

"Is that necessary? I thought we might use him for this purpose without telling any secrets."

"I judge that it will not be worth your while to try any fooling with him."

"Very well, Julia; I rely upon your judgment. What is your name, my young friend?"

"Sim Brattle."

"The fact is, Sim, that we want you to take the place of a dear young friend of ours who is absent. He is far away, so far that he cannot get back here in time to be present in some proceedings that must take place to-morrow."

"Son of yours?" asked Sim, jerking a quick glance at the speaker.

"Not exactly. The fact is that we are his guardians—that is, I am his guardian—and we must produce him in court to-morrow—before a referee, I should say—to settle a little matter of business."

"Fur to draw money on him?" inquired Sim.

"Dear me! what a sharp boy! Not exactly to draw money on him, but to settle the amount of the yearly allowance that I am to receive and lay out upon him until he is of age."

"That's all solid," remarked Sim, and he at once began to wonder how much that allowance would be, and how he could make sure that it would all be spent upon him. As Mr. Ames and his wife were whispering together, he began to speculate upon another point—

what had become of the boy whose place he was to take?

"Is he far away, that boy?" he asked.

"Very far," replied Mr. Ames.

"Sure he won't be back soon?"

"Oh, I am quite sure of that."

"Had any letters from him since he's been gone?"

"None lately."

"Maybe he's where they don't have any post-offices. It would be a pity if he's dead."

"That is a point that doesn't concern you, my young friend," said Mr. Ames. "You must understand that your appearance in place of our dear Arthur is merely a matter of form."

"Is it that kind of a deal?" remarked Sim, rising, and picking up his hat. "Then I pass out."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mr. Ames, and his yellow face turned yellower.

"I mean to say that I don't take a bit of stock in mere matters of form. If there ain't somethin' solid in this racket, count me out."

"Oh, you shall be paid for your trouble, and well paid. Sit down, my young friend, and make yourself easy. You will find that the business is solid enough, as far as you are concerned. Of course it is confidential. Do you know what confidential means?"

"Ya-as—I guess it means crooked."

"It means nothing of the kind. It means that you must keep a still tongue in your head—that you must tell nobody."

"Maybe it comes to the same thing," suggested Sim.

Mrs. Ames shook her head, as if to intimate that this boy was too sharp, and might do a little too well.

"The first thing to be done," said Mr. Ames, "is to fit you out with a fine suit of clothes, and I will take you out directly and buy them for you."

"Sim's eyes sparkled. There was something 'solid' in a suit of clothes.

"That ain't the fust thing though," he said.

"What is the first, then?"

"I'm hungry."

"Of course you shall have your dinner, and a bath too, as you need one badly, and we have no time to lose."

Sim Brattle bathed luxuriously, and dined sumptuously. When he had eaten as much as he could hold, he mentally resolved that the place in which he found himself was a good place, and that if he was as sharp as he supposed himself to be, he would stay there.

"I am just in the right fix now, mister, to fit into a suit of new clothes," he said.

"Come with me, then, and you shall soon be fitted. Remember that your name is now Arthur Ames."

"Not yet, mister," replied Sim.

"Why so?"

"When I git inside of Arthur Ames's clothes, I will be Arthur Ames. As long as I am wearing Sim Brattle's clothes, I will be Sim Brattle."

Mr. Ames looked at the lad as if he was disposed to doubt, as his wife had, whether this boy might not prove to be a little too sharp.

But Sim was taken to a clothing store, where

he was fitted with a complete suit, ready made, but quite stylish, and it seemed to him that there was but one thing needed to make him a first class young gentleman.

"I would be all right now," he said, "if I had some money to jingle in my pocket."

Mr. Ames gave him some silver change, and said that it was time to go home.

"I've got a little bit of business to attend to first," he said. "I promised to meet a friend of mine at the Union Depot at six o'clock."

"What friend?" asked Mr. Ames, looking at him suspiciously. "You told me that you had no friends here."

"Only my pardner, Bill Yards, who was on the train with me last night."

"I don't see that you need to meet him now."

"But I promised to, and I can't go back on my promise."

"Ah! Well, Arthur, I am glad to see that you are inclined to keep your promises, and I hope you will always keep them. Go and see your friend, but make a quick job of it, and be sure that you say not a word about me or the matters we have talked of."

"All right, sir. I'm fly. Anybody who tries to catch Arthur Ames for a sucker, will be likely to lose a hook."

Bill Yards, returning to the Union Depot at six o'clock, with a bootblack's outfit hanging on his arm, saw nothing of his friend Sim. But he did see a stylish young fellow sauntering about there, wearing a new suit of clothes that did not seem to have become entirely familiar with his form.

"There's a young swell, now," said Bill, "who is puttin' on more airs than a tree-toad in a cherry orchard, and I mean to tackle him for a shine. Bet he'll be fool enough to gimme a dime."

"Shine, sir? Shine 'em up? See your face in 'em for ten cents."

The young swell turned on his heel contemptuously.

"There is ten cents for you," he said, throwing down a coin. "Now go and start a bank!"

Bill Yards dropped his box, and stared, with his mouth and eyes wide open, at the liberal youth.

"Thunderation!" was all he could say. For once his tongue was not equal to the task of expressing his sentiments.

"What's the matter, bub?" asked the young upstart.

"May I be copper-distilled if I don't believe I'm crazy! Can my ears believe my eyesight? Has the comet throwed everything into everlastin' smash, or is this Sim Brattle?"

"Didn't you really know me, Bill?" inquired Sim.

"Durned if I did, and I ain't so bu'stin' sure that I know you now."

"Then I'm all right, and will pass in any crowd. Ain't this a killin' rig, Bill?"

"Killin'? I should blush to remark. It's nothin' short of murder in the first degree, with malice aforesaid. What have you been steppin' into, anyhow? Found a gold mine, or j'ined a whisky ring?"

"I told you, Bill, that I was goin' to try to

light on some rich old gentleman who wanted to adopt a norfin. Well, I struck him."

"Did you, though?"

"Don't I look like it? I am residin' at present in a palatual mansion on Chouteau avenue. Want any money? Here's a half dollar."

Bill stared at the coin, and fingered it, as if he was afraid it might vanish at any moment.

"I give in, Sim," he said, quite meekly. "I'm rattled. I ain't nothin' but a street scalawag, sca'cely fit to black boots for sech smart speki-lators as you. How did you do it? Gimme the tip. What sort of a racket are you on, any-how?"

"That's a mystery," solemnly replied Sim. "I can't tell you now. I've got to keep mum for awhile. This is important business, you see. Private and confidential. But I'm on the right track, and mean to stick to it. When I git settled down, and can see my way ahead a little furdur, you may bet that your pardner won't go back on you. If you'd seen the way I fixed up things to-day, Bill, and had heard me chin around among the airystuckupracy, you'd ha' said that Sim Brattle's head is as level as a railroad track. I've got to keep it level, too, or somethin' will smash."

"To think that I'd almost picked you up for a greeny!" exclaimed Bill, regarding his friend with admiration. "You're a regular tiptopper, and no mistake. When Barnum wants to git hold of a great moral phenomenon, I mean to tell him to come out here and ketch Sim Brattle."

"All right, Bill; but you mustn't call me by that name afore folks. I have had a new christenin', and have got a new name."

"Who are you now?"

"Ames is my name—Arthur Ames, Esquire."

"Any relation to Amy Ames?"

"Not that I know of. Wish I was."

"That reminds me," said Bill. "I saw that gal to-day."

"You saw Amy? Was her mother with her? Did you go to her house?"

"I met her on the street. You oughter know that her mother can't git out o' the house. She asked after you. I am goin' to see 'em to-morrer."

"I wish I could go," said Sim, looking at his new suit and thinking what a fine figure he was for a visit. "But I can't go to-morrow."

"Plenty of time. I say, Sim, I am goin' to hunt up that old chap whose sachel you found, too."

"I wish you would wait until I can go with you."

"Guess I'd better make a strike when you can't go. Mebbe he's another rich old gen'leman who wants to adopt a norfin, and I mus'n't miss any chances. When will I see you ag'in, Sim?"

"Right here, to-morrow evenin' at six, and every evenin' at six, until I can invite you to my palatual residence; and now I must light out for that sweet spot right away, without stoppin' to play marbles on the road."

"So long, Sim, and keep your head level."

"I'll try, and will be here to-morrow evenin' at six, sure."

CHAPTER IV.

BILL YARDS BECOMES AMBITIOUS.

BILL YARDS was full of admiration for his friend and ally.

Nothing had ever struck him as so wonderful as this—that a boy of fifteen should come to such a city as St. Louis, a stranger, friendless, penniless, and nearly ragged, and in less than a day should be "splurging" around, dressed up "to the nines," with money in his pocket, and claiming as his home a "palatual residence" on Chouteau avenue!

It was a miracle—it was a fairy tale—it was a revised edition of Aladdin and the lamp! How had he done it? What sort of a streak of luck had he struck? Were there any more such openings in St. Louis? Had he really been adopted by some rich man, or was he running on a track that would speedily bring him to the State prison?

Bill kept worrying his head with this problem through the night, in the cheap lodging-house where he had taken a bed, and awoke in the morning determined to "make a strike" and to find or force a way to fortune as his friend had done.

As he told Sim Brattle, he had met Amy Ames the day before. He had recognized her at once as the girl whom he and his friend had saved from the wrecked and burning car, but she, who had had but a brief glimpse of him in the darkness, did not know him at first. Bill was not too bashful to recall himself to her acquaintance, and she greeted him joyfully.

"I am so glad to see you," she said. "I was afraid that we might never run across you again, though you had saved our lives. Where is your friend, Sim Brattle?"

Bill Yards could only answer that Sim was somewhere in St. Louis.

"Do bring him up to our house. Poor ma is laid up with her broken ankle; but she will be ever so glad to see you both, and I know she wants to thank you, and perhaps we can do something to help you, for I do believe that you are even poorer than we are. Here is our street and number—see, I put it on this card—and you must be sure to come, and when shall we look for you?"

"To-morrow morning," replied Bill, glad of a chance to put a word in.

"Don't fail to come, then, or we shall be awfully disappointed, and tell your friend that we want to see him ever so much."

When Bill started out in the morning to find the way to fortune, he left his box of blacking tools at the lodging-house, for fear that it might stand in the way of his immediate adoption by some solid citizen.

But he was willing to postpone his ambitious schemes until he could make the promised call on Mrs. Ames and her daughter, and toward the address that had been given him he first turned his steps.

He found them living in a small but neat house in the northern part of the city, and was warmly welcomed by Amy, who took him into a pleasant room where her mother was lying on a lounge, with her ankle in splints.

"You find me scarcely able to move," said

Mrs. Ames, when she had greeted the lad in the friendliest manner; "but I am glad that I am alive, and that piece of good fortune I owe to you and your friend. But where is he? Amy told me that you were both coming here this morning."

Bill hardly knew what to say about his friend, for fear that he would say too much; but he explained that Sim was kept away by "important business," and that he had "struck a lucky streak."

"I am so sorry!" exclaimed Amy. "That is I am awfully glad if he is lucky, but so sorry that he could not come. This very day, too, when my brother Dick has just come home from Colorado—Santa Clara, in Colorado—do you know Santa Clara?—it is a new place where they dig gold, and everybody gets rich all of a sudden, and we are hoping that Dick will get rich, and we have told him all about you and your friend, and he is awfully anxious to see you both."

"How you do run on, Amy!" said her mother. "Suppose you run to the door. I heard the bell, and perhaps that is Dick himself."

So it was, and he proved to be a fine young man of twenty or twenty-one, tall for his age, handsome enough to be Amy's brother, with sun-browned cheeks and such an appearance of health and strength as made Bill Yards delight to look upon him.

Richard Ames at once put the street lad at his ease, made him feel at home, and in a short time had drawn out his entire history, including his present condition and his immediate desires.

"I am thinkin'," said Sim, "of lookin' about to find some rich old gen'leman who wants to adopt a norfin, as Sim Brattle got adopted yesterday."

"Has he really been adopted?" asked Richard Ames.

"Guess you'd think so, if you should see his rig. Why, he is togged out in as big style as the lilies of the valley that Scriptor tells about."

"That is really astonishing. I can't pretend to understand it. But we will know all about it, I suppose, when we see him. Well, Master Bill, I am neither an old man nor a rich one, and it is too early for me to begin to adopt orphans; but my mother and sister want to do something for you, to prove that they are grateful; and so, if you will take a walk with me, we will find a clothing store, and see what sort of a suit can be got for you."

There was no refusing this good-natured offer. If Bill had wanted to refuse it, his kind friends would not have allowed him to think of such a thing. So he went out with Richard Ames, and soon his appearance was transformed as nothing but a change from rags to new and nice clothing can transform a person.

As he admired himself in a glass, it occurred to him that he had at least taken one step up the ladder which Sim Brattle had mounted—he was well dressed. It also occurred to him that it would never do for the possessor of such a suit to descend to blacking boots or selling papers. Good clothes are a powerful stimulus to ambition. As he had got a start, he could not stop, but must go on and up.

Then he must go with Richard Ames to the house again, and show the suit to the ladies, and then he must stay to dinner, which had been kept back for him and Dick.

By the time dinner was over he had got into a fidget thinking over the golden moments he was losing, and the splendid chances he was missing. If he was to step into a fortune such as Sim's, before six o'clock in the evening, he must hurry and find it.

So he hastened away after promising to return soon, and went in search of Cornelius Corum, the old man with the heavy sachel.

It was not easy to find the address which he had preserved in his memory, among the rookeries of that part of North Second street to which he had been directed, some of which seemed to have existed since the time when St. Louis was a French settlement. But he finally found the name of "C. Corum, Agent," on a little old tin sign at the door of an old building which had a brick wall for the ground floor and tumble-down frame for the upper story.

There was nothing to show that C. Corum was agent of or for anything in particular, and no sign of any sort of business in the dirt-covered windows, and Bill Yards shook his head sadly as he thought that this rookery was far different from the "palatial residence" of which Sim had boasted.

He knocked boldly at the door, which was opened after some delay by a very ugly negro girl, and was admitted into the dark interior.

When his eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, he looked around, and perceived that he was in a square room, low-ceilinged, dingy, dirty and without the least sign of wealth or luxury. There was no carpet on the floor, and the only furniture was an old desk, a battered bureau, a stand of pigeon-holes, a rusty safe, and a few worn and clumsy chairs.

A closer look showed him one piece of comfortable furniture—a cushioned arm-chair, roomy and well-padded, in which was seated an old man with a short, thick body and very slim legs. He had a square face, a low forehead, small eyes and rusty gray hair and beard.

The lad at once recognized him as the man who had lost the sachel, and was not at all pleased with his appearance.

"What do you want, now?" sharply demanded the old man. "Out with it, and be quick, for time is valuable. If you have come from Owings, you may go right back and tell him that he can have no more money until he pays that last note—not a cent."

Bill Yards had helped himself to a chair, and did not seem to be in any sort of a hurry.

"I thought you might know me," he said. "Do you remember losin' a sachel full of money night afore last, when the train was smashed?"

"There was no money in that sachel," sharply replied Mr. Corum. "How can you say that there was money in it? I never carry anything valuable, and never have anything valuable to carry."

"You said you would give a reward to the fellers that found it," suggested Bill.

"Are you one of those boys? Yes, I know you now, though you have come out in gay

colors, like the flowers in Spring. He, he! But you are not the boy who found the sachel. Where is he?"

"He couldn't come with me to-day," replied Bill.

"You must bring him, if you expect to get anything. I offered to give something, and I will think of it. Yes, I will think of it before you come again. But you must bring the other boy, as he found the sachel. You may go now."

But Bill Yards was not ready to go. If there was a fortune to be stepped into, it would never do to walk backward, and he returned to the attack.

"The other boy has struck it lucky," he said. "He has been adopted by a rich old gentleman who lives in a palatial residence on Chouteau Avenue, and the flowers in spring can't hold a candle to his style."

The old man looked at the lad with an incredulous sneer, as if to say "What are you giving me?"

"It's a fact, mister. He has come out like a rainbow after a shower. So I thought I had better look over the town for some rich old gentleman who wants to adopt a norfin, and I came here to give you the first chance."

Mr. Corum leaned back in his chair, and stared at the lad for some minutes without speaking.

"Merciful heavens!" he exclaimed at last. "Has the boy gone crazy? Who ever heard of such a thing? Do I look like a rich old gentleman? Does this poor hovel of mine look like a rich man's residence?"

"It won't allus do to bet high on looks," replied Bill.

"Mercy on us! What a world is this! You have come to the wrong shop, my lad. I do not wish to adopt an orphan. I would as soon think of adopting a rattlesnake or a wildcat. I have a son, I am sorry to say, who is the torment of my life, and who is always annoying me by asking for money, though I have scarcely enough to keep a roof over my own head. But I have sent him off to Colorado, where I hope he will stay, and you may go off now, and—you need not trouble yourself to come back."

Bill Yards, dropped his head. This did not look a bit like stepping into a fortune. How had Sim Brattle done it? What was the secret of his success? Why had not that young aristocrat told his friend how to "work the racket?"

The ugly negro girl came into the room by some unperceived entrance, and whispered to the old man, who turned pale, trembled, and looked anxiously about.

"He here!" he exclaimed. "Birch Corum come back! Are you sure of that, Rose?"

"Yes, sah. I see'd him a while ago, walkin' on t'other side of the street, and lookin' at the house. The sidewalk wasn't nigh wide enough for him."

"Mercy on us! This is terrible. What shall I do? I must lock up everything. I will apply to the police. No, that would never do."

His eyes rested on Bill Yards, and a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"Ah, my young friend!" he said. "I am glad you came. You are a fine lad, and I would like to do something for you. I can't adopt you; but I can give you a good supper and a home for the night. How would you like to sleep with me to-night?"

"I ain't fond o' sleepin' with old folks," bluntly replied Bill.

"Oh, I don't ask you to sleep *with* me, but in the house. You shall have a bed to yourself, and a good one. Will you stay?"

"All right; but I've got to be at the Union Depot at six o'clock, to meet my pardner, Sim Brattle."

"Can't you put that off?"

"Not for no money."

"Be in a hurry, then. It is nearly six o'clock now, and I want you to come back as soon as you possibly can."

The lad promised to do so, and the door was locked and barred behind him.

"If I had as level a head as Sim Brattle has got, I would make a strike out o' this," he muttered, as he walked away.

CHAPTER V.

MIXED FAMILY MATTERS.

At the Union Depot Bill Yards failed to find his friend Sim Brattle, *alias* Arthur Ames. He looked all about the neighborhood, and made inquiries of various persons; but nobody had seen such a young gentleman as he described, and he was surely not visible to Bill's sharp eyes.

After waiting as long as he thought he could afford to, the lad went back to keep his appointment with Cornelius Corum. He was grieved because he had not been able to show Sim his new suit, and troubled because his friend had failed to come to meet him.

What was the matter? Something unusual must have happened to keep Sim away. Had he climbed the ladder of fortune to such a height that he could no longer look back on his friend? Or had he—and this was the thought that Bill Yards really worried over—got into a scrape from which even his level head could not extricate him?

At the Corum house Bill was admitted by the ugly negro girl after the usual delay, and there he found another visitor making himself at home.

He at once jumped to the conclusion that this visitor was the son of whom the old man had spoken—Birch Corum, who had unexpectedly returned from Colorado.

He was led to this conclusion by the appearance of the visitor, who looked like the copy of the old man, except that his lower limbs were not small and shrunken. He was roughly dressed, and his skin was very dark, and his hair and beard were uncombed, and his small eyes were red, and he had the appearance, as Bill Yards thought, of a man who had been on a "reg'lar jamboree."

"This is a young friend of mine, Birch," said Mr. Corum when the lad entered the room—"a young friend who has done me some small favors, and I want to be kind to him."

"Glad to see that you can be kind to somebody," replied the young man, without giving

Bill a second glance. "I think you ought to begin by being kind to me. Here am I, your only son, who have been far away, and have come back dead broke, and only ask for enough to take me out to Colorado again. Instead of killing the fatted calf for me, you want to give me nothing but the cold shoulder."

"How have you got rid of all you had, Birch? I gave you a fine outfit, and it cost a great deal of money."

"A thimbleful to a thirsty man. I came on here with some cattle, and went around with the boys, and bucked against the keno men, who ought to be shot for playing a rascally, swindling game. The long and short of it is that I am flat broke, and I want money enough to take me back to Santa Clara."

"You are pumping at a dry well, Birch," said the old man. "Money is very scarce. I have hardly enough to keep body and soul together. My little rents come in very slowly, and taxes and repairs and assessments are something terrible."

"That be blowed! I have heard the same sort of chin-music from you so often that I am sick of it. You can't fool me. I know you have plenty, and I want a little for my share. You had better give it to me, too, without any fuss, or you will be likely to regret it. If I should turn my tongue loose, I might worry you some."

"How much will you need?"

"I shall want a thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars! Merciful Heavens! Is there so much money as that in the world? I might raise a hundred dollars by borrowing—but a thousand! Do you take me for a millionaire?"

"I take you for just what you are, and I shall expect the money to-morrow."

"Perhaps I can raise five hundred, Birch, by putting a mortgage on a bit of land I have left; but it will ruin me."

"I know just how much it will ruin you. I tell you that I want a thousand dollars, and I will call here at noon to-morrow to get it. Give me five dollars now, and I will not trouble you until then."

The old man hunted in his pockets until he found a crumpled bill, which he had probably placed there in expectation of just such a demand. He gave this to his son, who left the house without another word, and the door was locked and barred behind him.

"That is a very bad young man," said Mr. Corum, when he resumed his seat. "It is awfully wicked in him to try to force money from such a poor and broken down old man as I am. But I must try to get a little for him, if I have to sell everything, and send him back to Colorado. I see by the papers that they are expecting an Indian war to break out there, and that is something to look forward to. Now, my young friend, we will have our supper and go to bed."

After seeing that everything on the ground floor was locked, bolted, barred, and otherwise made secure, the old man knocked on the ceiling.

A trap door was opened, a ladder was let down and Mr. Corum mounted it, followed by

Bill Yards. The ladder was then drawn up, and the trap was closed.

The lad was struck dumb with astonishment at finding himself in a brilliantly lighted and elegantly furnished room, which seemed to occupy the entire space of the second floor of the old rookery. Such an establishment was the last thing he would have expected to find in that quarter. The walls were hung with rich and costly materials, the carpet was the heaviest velvet pile, a finely carved bedstead occupied a corner, and the room was fairly crowded with elegant furniture, paintings, statuettes and other articles of ornament. Bill Yards had never seen such a profusion of luxurious fittings.

"These are some things that I have taken on storage," said the old man. "The owner thought they would be safer here, and he is kind enough to let me use them."

Bill did not credit a word of this, and was inclined to believe that Birch Corum had placed a pretty fair estimate on his father's wealth. But he did not give words to his doubt, and prepared to enjoy the comforts and luxuries of a "palatial residence."

The supper, which was brought in by the ugly black girl from some locality which the lad could not even guess at, was very fine, and was served on an elegant table, loaded with handsome dishes and costly silver. Bill Yards opened his eyes in wonder, but did not fail to eat as if he might not get another square meal for a month.

When this meal was over, Mr. Corum lighted a meerschaum pipe, and smoked in silence.

Bill Yards was also silent. He was wondering why he had been brought up there to pass the night, and he wished that his level-headed friend, Sim Brattle, was there to look the matter through and "give him the tip."

He was soon to be enlightened as to the purpose of his presence.

Mr. Corum, when he had finished his smoke, brought out a revolver.

"Can you fire a pistol?" he asked.

"I guess I can, as well as the next man," replied Bill.

"You are to take this revolver, then, and have it within reach when you lie down. If anybody should try to break into the house, shoot him."

"On the spot," added Bill.

"Wherever you may happen to see him."

The lad began to see through the hole in the mill-stone. Mr. Corum was expecting a midnight visitation from his scapegrace of a son.

"S'posin' it should be that young man who was here this evenin'," suggested Bill.

"That was my son," replied Mr. Corum. "I cannot believe that he would be guilty of an attempt to rob his poor old father. But he is a very wicked young man, and the wicked are apt to come to untimely ends."

A bed was made on the floor for the lad, and he noticed that it was placed exactly over the trap door. But that did not alarm him in the least, and he lay down as soon as he was allowed to, and slept the sleep that usually goes

with youth, health, a clear conscience, and a good supper.

That is to say, he slept very soundly. Nothing disturbed his slumber, and when he awoke in the morning he found the unused revolver lying where he had left it.

Cornelius Corum did not seem to be greatly relieved by the fact that he had passed a quiet night. Indeed, it might be supposed that he was disappointed because nobody had attempted to break into the house.

"I am afraid," he said, "that my unfortunate son must have got very drunk last night."

Bill Yards was given a good breakfast, and was taken down-stairs and dismissed.

"How much do you pay your night watchman, mister?" he asked.

The old man squeezed a dollar out of his breeches pocket, and gave it to the lad, making him promise to return there in the afternoon, if convenient, and in the evening as a matter of certainty.

"There must be some sort of a fortune in this," muttered Bill, as he walked away; "but I can't seem to get the hang of it. If Sim Brattle was here, he could put me right onto it; but I can't see my way clear to take hold of it."

He went directly to Mrs. Ames's house, where he found Dick and his mother engaged in a discussion of family affairs, to which he listened.

"You have not told me all the news yet, mother," said the young man. "The most important point is to come. How is uncle Augustus getting on?"

"You know that we never see him, my son. He never comes near us, and we are not disposed to force ourselves upon him. I hear that he is living in fine style, and you may guess whose money it is that keeps him up."

"Has my cousin Arthur been heard of?"

"Yes, at last. I have not much money for lawyers, but have engaged Mr. Brenner to keep the run of things for us. He tells me that there was what he calls a reference yesterday, and that your uncle Augustus appeared before the referee with your cousin Arthur, and that a large allowance was fixed upon, to be continued until he comes of age. I don't wish to be uncharitable, but it is clear to me that your uncle Augustus will get the benefit of it."

"You are never uncharitable, mother. You are only speaking the plain truth. Where had Arthur been all the while?"

"At school in Cincinnati."

"I had almost begun to believe that he was dead."

"So had I," said Mrs. Ames.

"It is very strange. I can't see why they should send him off to Cincinnati, or what motive they could have had in keeping him hid, unless they supposed we would want to murder him. If he should die, the property would come to us, would it not?"

"Yes—to you and Amy, under his father's will. Your uncle Augustus is only the executor."

"Is it not a large property?"

"Yes; your uncle Arthur left a very valuable estate."

"It seems to me that there is something mysterious and crooked in the business. But we won't worry about it, mother. It is all waiting for dead men's shoes, anyhow, and we are talking about matters that our friend Bill does not understand. You must pardon us, Bill, and tell us now why you did not bring your friend here this morning."

Bill Yards shook his head sadly.

"I don't know what's become of him," he said. "I told you that he had been adopted as a norfin by a rich old gentleman, and was dressed up as gay as a stock broker. He promised to meet me at the Union Depot yesterday evenin' at six, and every evenin' at six, and I went there; but he didn't turn up."

"Perhaps his new people would not let him come," suggested Amy.

"Mebbe so. I'm keen to bet he would have come if he hadn't been held, and I'm worried about him."

"You must go to the depot again this evening," said Dick. "If you don't find him then, we must see what can be done toward looking him up."

The lad stayed to dinner at Mrs. Ames's. He was indeed faring sumptuously. Then he decided that he would go back to Cornelius Corum's, by the way of passing the time. As he went, he found that his head was in a tangle.

"There's a mixed lot of Ames folks about here somehow," he muttered. "Dick Ames has got a cousin Arthur, and I guess his name must be Ames, too. He has been missin', and has jist turned up. Sim Brattle's name is Arthur Ames now, and that's a queer mix of things. I wish I could git it straight. If Sim was here now, he would put his level head onto it, and take the twist out of the tangle in no time."

Yes—Sim could have done that very thing.

CHAPTER VI.

"I MEAN TO STICK."

As a matter of fact, Sim Brattle was not then in a position to take the twist out of his own tangles, and Bill Yards was correct in guessing that his friend had been kept away from the place of meeting by force.

After leaving Bill he had returned to the "palatial residence" on Chouteau avenue, where he was feasted and spoken to as "Arthur." His treatment at the house of Augustus Ames impressed him so favorably that he was strengthened in his determination to stay there.

Mr. and Mrs. Ames devoted the evening to "coaching" him for the part he was to play the next day, and they found him such an apt scholar that they were sure their plan would prove a success.

His task, indeed, was an easy one. His face would identify him, and it would only be necessary to answer a few questions concerning Cincinnati, and there would be no difficulty about that, as he knew that city well.

He knew that there was something "crooked" in the transaction, and had some scruples of conscience about playing the part that was given him; but a night's rest in a luxurious bed and a breakfast which "got him for all he was worth," had much to do with silencing those

scruples, and he was more than ever determined that he would stick.

In the morning he was taken to a lawyer's office in the central part of the city, where a quiet little party was arranged for the occasion, composed of the lawyer whose office it was—who was a referee appointed by the Probate Court—Mr. and Mrs. Ames, Sim Brattle—*alias* Arthur Ames—Mr. Ames's lawyer, who had everything to say, and another lawyer, who had nothing to say.

When Sim was introduced to the referee as Arthur Ames, that gentleman shook hands with him, and congratulated him upon his stout and healthy appearance.

"It is a long time since I have seen you, my young friend," he said. "More than two years, I believe. It was shortly after your father's death when you came before me last. But you have not changed much, except that you have grown taller and heartier."

The referee then put a few questions to the lad, for which he had been duly prepared, and which he answered quite readily.

Mr. Ames said that he had sent Arthur away from St. Louis for the sake of his health, and the result showed that he had acted wisely. He intended to enter him at a college in Massachusetts, and asked an allowance from his father's estate for his support until he should come of age. He was of the opinion that \$3,000 a year would be a proper allowance.

"It sounds like a large sum for a boy," said the referee; "but he is growing older every day. Considering his station in life, and the fortune that he will inherit it does not seem to be too large a sum. Have you anything to say in the matter, Mr. Brennan?"

The silent lawyer replied that he had nothing to say, as he was merely a looker on, and had no interest that would justify him in interfering.

"Then I will report in favor of an allowance of \$3,000 a year, to be paid to Mr. Augustus Ames, who can apply to the Probate Court next month for a decree confirming the report, and that will end the matter until the young gentleman is twenty-one."

This closed the proceeding, and Sim returned with his new friends to their house on Chouteau avenue.

At dinner Mr. and Mrs. Ames complimented each other upon the success of their strategy; but Sim noticed that they did not compliment him. He also noticed that they had ceased addressing him as Arthur.

"By the way, my young friend," said Mr. Ames, "what did you say your name is?"

"It was Sim Brattle," replied the lad. "It is Arthur Ames now."

"Yes, Sim Brattle. I remember it now. Well, Sim, you have done very well to-day, and you shall not lose anything by this."

The lad mentally declared that he did not mean to lose anything by it. It seemed to him that there was a disposition to "count him out," to "shut down on him," and to "let him slide;" but he did not propose to allow anything of the sort as long as his head was level. He was in no hurry, however, and was content to hold his tongue and await developments.

He did not have to wait long. He was taken into the room where he first met his two employers, and Mr. Ames brought up the subject of his future movements.

"Now, Sim Brattle," said that gentleman, "I suppose you will be glad to go back to Cincinnati?"

"I hadn't thought of it," briefly replied Sim.

"But it will be best for you to go there or somewhere else, and I shall want you to do so. You have a fine suit of clothes, and of course I shall give you some money. So you will be able to go where you please, and that will be very nice for you."

"I am well enough off where I am," said Sim.

"But you have sense enough to know that I cannot allow you to stay in St. Louis, as something might happen here that would make trouble. I am through with you now, and I shall pay you off and send you away. Let me see—I think that twenty-five dollars would be a nice present for you. What do you say to that?"

"I've been figurin'," replied Sim, looking very solemn.

"What have you been figuring at?"

"At \$3,000 a year. As I figure it, that comes to \$250 a month, or \$75 and some cents a week. I hain't been in school at C'natta for nothin', and I don't care how I take it, so's I git it regular."

Augustus Ames looked at his wife, and his wife looked at him. His face expressed nothing but astonishment; but there was a smile on hers that might mean mischief.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "What have you to do with \$3,000?"

"That's my allowance—the figure fixed by yor and that lawyer for my support and eddication, as I heard you both say. That's what I want—no more, and no less."

Augustus Ames fell back in his chair, and amazement and horror were written in every wrinkle of his yellow countenance.

"This is too much!" he exclaimed. "Do you really fancy that the \$3,000 a year we spoke of is to go to you?"

"Who would it go to, then?" inquired Sim.

"To the real Arthur Ames, of course."

"Where is he?"

"He is absent from the city just now, but he will return."

"I guess he won't. You may think I am easy to fool, mister, but I guess you have got the wrong pig by the ear. There ain't no such a feller!"

"What has become of him, then?"

"He is dead!"

Mr. Ames was worse than astonished—he was bewildered. If a mule had kicked him he could hardly have been more demoralized. He looked to his wife for help, but she sat there with that amused smile on her face and said nothing. After twisting about in his chair for awhile, he gathered himself together and changed his style of attack.

"I am sorry, my young friend," he said, "that you have got such a wrong idea into your head, and that you are so willful and stubborn. I don't want to have any trouble with you—though I am not afraid of having any—and I do want to treat you kindly and liberally. How much shall

"I pay you, on your promise to leave St. Louis and stay away?"

"Send me off to college," replied Sim, "and gimme my reg'lar allowance, and I'll be satisfied."

"Will nothing less than that satisfy you?"

"No, sir-ee!"

"Then I will tell you what I will do. I will take that suit of clothes from you, and send you away with nothing at all."

"I guess you won't, mister."

"Why won't I?"

"Because I would go right out in town, and hunt up that lawyer, and tell him somethin' that would make him open his eyes."

"He would never listen to you," said Mr. Ames, triumphantly.

"I ain't sure that he would, from the squint I took at him to-day. But there's more lawyers in St. Louis than one, I guess."

"Do you know what you would do, you foolish boy? You would talk yourself right into the penitentiary."

"I hain't read about whisky rings for nothin', mister. I know what they do with the fellers who peach. It wouldn't be me who would git locked up, but some bigger and older folks."

Augustus Ames had reached the limit of his patience, and he flew into a passion.

"You infernal young rascal!" he exclaimed, as he jumped up.

But his wife laid her hand on his arm.

He looked at her, and saw that same calm smile on her fat face, and knew that she had come to his rescue. He resumed his seat, and was quiet.

Sim Brattle also saw that smile, and braced himself up, expecting nothing less than a severe tongue-lashing.

Greatly to his surprise, and still more to the surprise of her husband, she spoke pleasantly and kindly, and took Sim's side at once.

"The boy is right," she said.

"Right?" screamed Mr. Ames.

"Of course he is right, and you ought to have sense enough to see that he is. As he appeared as Arthur Ames to-day, he must continue to be Arthur Ames and keep his place, at least until our dear Arthur returns. If Arthur should not return, my dear—"

"Yes, my love."

"If Arthur should not return, I say, who could fill his place better than this bright and handsome lad, who resembles him so closely?"

Mr. Ames said nothing. He could not guess what his wife was aiming at, and thought it best to take refuge in silence.

"So we will send him to college," she continued, "and he shall have his allowance, though I think we ought not to give him the whole of it just yet. But that can be easily arranged, and I will get him an outfit and send him off as soon as he is ready to go."

Sim Brattle's face was bright enough then. The affair had turned out even better than he could have expected, and he praised himself for the firmness with which he had kept to the course he had marked out.

"Bill Yards was right when he told me I had a level head," he thought, "and he would swear to it if he knew how I have worked this racket."

Everythin' is lovely now, and if they should try any shenanigin after I git away, I will only have to pull the lawyer on them, and that will make them crawl."

"Does that suit you, Arthur?" asked Mrs. Ames, with a beaming smile.

"That's all I want, ma'am," replied Sim. "I have got into the family, you see, and I mean to stick."

"You are quite right to do so. What do you want, Augustus, my dear?"

Mr. Ames beckoned to his wife, who followed him out of the room into the front parlor, where he paced the floor in a high state of excitement.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "It is impossible that we should do what you propose to do. What are you driving at?"

"You silly man!" replied his wife. "You should keep your eyes open and have your wits about you. That boy is dangerous—very dangerous—and his tongue would ruin us. We wanted a smart boy, and have found one who is a great deal too smart. As he will not keep quiet willingly, he must be forced to do so. In short, he must be put where he can do us no harm."

"You are right, my love, as you always are."

CHAPTER VII.

TRICKED AND TRAPPED.

WHEN Mrs. Ames came back into the library with her husband, her face fairly glistened with good humor.

"Mr. Ames has been begging my pardon because he had disagreed with me," said she. "He now says that I ought to get your outfit at once. But it is really too late in the day to go shopping."

"That's a fact," said Sim. "If you please, ma'am, it is just about the right time for me to go to the Union Depot. I promised to meet my pardner there at six o'clock."

"The person you went to meet yesterday evening?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I wish you would put it off until to-morrow. He will not feel uneasy if he misses you this evening. I will go out with you to-morrow, and then you shall have a fine gold watch to show him."

The mention of a gold watch turned the scale, and Sim reluctantly consented to remain and let his friend wait until another evening. Yet he began to have a shadow of suspicion that all was not right. He fancied that Mrs. Ames was a little too kind and cheerful.

Sim Brattle did not leave the house, but Augustus Ames did. He did not appear at the supper table, and it was nearly nine o'clock when he returned.

He had a little private conversation with his wife, who shortly entered the room in which Sim was seated, dressed for going out.

"Mr Ames has brought me some tickets for the theater," she said. "As he is too tired to go with me, I will take you, Arthur, if you are willing."

Sim suggested that it was rather late for that; but she assured him that she never cared to see

a play until the first act was over, and he gladly consented to go with her, as a gold watch and an evening at a theater were enough to disturb the level of any young fellow's head.

"When our friends see him with me at the theater," she said, addressing her husband, "they will know that Arthur has come home, and that we have nothing to conceal."

A carriage was waiting at the door, which they entered, and Sim Brattle felt that he had fairly begun a life of luxury. He wished that Bill Yards could be there to see him.

It was a long distance to that theater. The carriage was driven rapidly, and time was passing, and block after block was left behind; but Sim saw nothing that looked like a theater. He was beginning to get uneasy. Mrs. Ames noticed this, and quieted him.

"I am in no hurry to get to the theater," she said, "and am going a little out of the way to call on a sick person. It will take only a few minutes, and it is but a block or so from the theater. We are nearly there now."

Soon the carriage stopped at a small two-story brick house that stood alone, out at the edge of the city. The shutters of this house were closed tightly and no light was visible.

"You may go in with me, Arthur," said Mrs. Ames, as she stepped out of the carriage.

He followed her in at the door, which she opened without ringing or knocking, and they entered a narrow, uncarpeted and dimly-lighted hall.

She led the way to the second floor, and stopped at a door near the head of the stairs.

"You may wait in here for a few minutes, Arthur," she said, "while I speak to the sick woman."

She opened the door, but he hesitated. He did not like the looks of the dark room, or the peculiar smile on her face.

As he halted on the sill, she gave him a vigorous push which sent him into the middle of the room. Then she quickly pulled the door to and locked it on the outside. In a few minutes he heard the carriage drive away.

It was some little time before Sim Brattle could recover himself sufficiently to reflect upon his position. The suddenness of his imprisonment had amazed and bewildered him. He had fallen from such a height of good fortune that the shock stunned him.

"Durn the women!" was the first result of his meditations, as his wits came back to him. "Durn the women, anyhow! Any one of them has got more tricks than a dozen men. I had the old man dead to rights, but let his wife jump in and take the game out of my hands. I might have known she was playin' roots on me, from the soft way she worked it. I did know it, but I follered right along, like a first-class idiot, and let her do just as she pleased with me, and here she has got me shut up like a mouse in a trap. But 'most any feller would trust a fat woman."

After trying the door and finding it securely closed, he indulged in a little more reflection.

"If Bill Yards was here now," he said, "he would take back what he told me about my head bein' level. It's the poorest excuse for a head that could be picked up outside of a cab-

bage patch. There's only one thing left for me now, and that is to wait till the fool-killer comes around. I guess he's got my measure for a coffin. But, gracious spikes! if I could git out of here, wouldn't I make it hot for 'em!"

The idea of getting out was easier to reflect upon than to act upon. The room could not have been darker if it had been filled with pitch, and it was only by feeling around that he could make any discoveries.

There was little to discover. There was not a table in the room, nor a chair, nor a stick of furniture of any kind. On the bare floor was a straw bed, with not a bit of bedclothes upon it. This was all.

There was one window, which the lad found, and tried to raise, but it was nailed down tightly. He shook it with all his force, and the noise he made brought from the yard below the response of a deep growl, followed by a bark, such as might proceed from the throat of a full-grown mastiff or bull dog. He stamped on the floor and shouted; but only the dog made answer, and his reply was not calculated to comfort the prisoner.

Sim clearly perceived that he must abandon all attempts to escape, at least until daylight. When he had reached this conclusion, he lay down on the bed, and in a few minutes was sound asleep.

In the morning some breakfast was brought to him by a big-fisted and hard-featured Irishman, who looked as if he might be a near relative of the big dog below.

The lad's eyes had by this time become accustomed to the absence of light, and the little that filtered through chinks showed him nothing more of the room than he already knew, except that the close shutters were battened in, so that no force of his could open them. Clearly there was nothing for him to do but to wait and see what the future would bring forth.

He waited, with growing impatience, while the long hours passed slowly, and there was nothing to break the monotony of the day but the appearance of the Irishman with his dinner, and nothing could induce that Irishman to utter a word.

This solitary confinement was breaking the lad's spirit, and all sorts of gloomy thoughts and desperate resolves were taking possession of him, when a man opened the door and walked into the room.

The door was left wide open when the man entered; but Sim saw plainly that there was no chance to escape, as the new-comer was a strongly-built man, coarsely dressed, with a low forehead, a bearded face that was dark from exposure to sun and wind, and a general dare-devil recklessness of appearance.

"I have come to take you away from here, bub," said this rough-looking customer. "You are going West, to grow up with the country."

"Yes?" said Sim, inquiringly, pleased that there was no prospect of being immediately murdered.

"Yes; you are going far away from here, and I want you to mark what I tell you now, and remember it. You have been threatening to

make trouble for some friends of mine, and they want me to take you out of their way. In fact, they have paid me to do it. I hope that is plain enough talk."

"I will be mighty glad to git out of this place, anyhow," remarked Sim.

"You won't be hurt," continued the man, "if you mind what I tell you. You are a boy who has run away from his folks in Colorado, and I am an officer who is taking you back there. That's what I shall say about you, if I have to say anything, and you had better not even think of saying anything against it; for I am Blackhawk, the Terror of the Plains, and it ain't safe to fool with me."

Sim opened his eyes wide, and directed at the speaker a stare of mingled awe and admiration.

"Gracious spikes!" he exclaimed. "Are you one of those fellers, mister—like Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack? And are you goin' out among the Injuns, and all that sort of thing? And are you goin' to take me with you? Oh, that'll be jolly! That was only a bit of a lark I had with old Mr. Ames, and I didn't mean any harm, and if they had offered me such a chance as this I would have jumped at it."

"Come along, then, and see that you keep jumping at it."

"You bet I will jump, when such a splendid lookin' man as you are takes the lead. Say, Mr. Blackhawk, am I goin' to have a rifle, and kill Injuns?"

The Terror of the Plains was evidently impressed by the admiring enthusiasm of the young prisoner.

"All that will come along in time, if you prove to be the right kind of a chap," he replied. "But you mus'n't call me Blackhawk about here. You may call me Birch. Come along, now!"

When Sim followed his leader out of the house he noticed that the day was near spent. A carriage was waiting at the door, which they entered, and were driven rapidly to the railroad depot, where they boarded a train that was about to leave.

As the bell was ringing, and the conductor was shouting "All aboard!" Sim was looking out of the window, and he caught sight of Bill Yards, who was standing still and staring about.

Sim knew his friend's face well enough, though the dress was strange to him, and he hastened to attract his attention.

"Hey, Bill!" he shouted.

"What do you mean by that?" said Birch, as he jerked the lad away from the window.

"I saw a partner of mine out there. Gracious spikes! ain't he dressed up, though!"

And the train rattled away.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILL YARDS UNTWISTS A TANGLE.

AFTER leaving Mrs. Ames's house, Bill Yards sauntered down to Cornelius Corum's rookery.

He found that disagreeable old gentleman in a more agreeable mood than usual. Indeed, he was in quite a good humor.

"Come in, my young friend," he said. "Come in and sit down. William is your name, I

believe. I am glad to see you, William. That wicked young man, my son, called on me at noon; but I was ready for him. Not with money, though—he, he!—but with something that was as good as money, and that saved me quite a sum.

"You see, William, a friend of mine came to me this morning—a wealthy old gentleman, who lives in a fine house on Chouteau avenue, and he wanted some advice about a boy. It seems that he had taken this boy to his house out of charity, and had given him a fine suit of clothes, and had fed and lodged him. The boy was useful to him in a little matter of business; but that is of no consequence."

Bill thought of Sim Brattle's fine new suit, and of the "palatial residence" of which his friend had spoken; but he wisely kept his thoughts to himself.

"This boy began to give my friend trouble," continued the old man. "He was about your size, I judge, and proved to be a very wicked boy. When my friend had no further use for him, he was about to send him away; but he said he meant to stick. Merciful Heavens! How impudent some boys are! He seemed to think that he owned all my friend's property, and he vowed and declared that he meant to have a big share of it."

"My friend, who is not as sharp as he might be, flew into a passion; but his wife, who has a big head full of sense, humored the boy, and told him that he should have all he wanted. So she took him out for a ride, and quietly shut him up in a tight place, where she had him as snug as a cork in a jug."

"Where is he now?" asked Bill.

"That is what you don't need to know. He will not stay there long. My friend came to me to ask me what he should do with the boy. That's a fine chance, thinks I, to get some money for my son. So I told my friend that I knew of a wicked young man who was going to a very dangerous place in Colorado, and who would be glad to take the boy out there, if well paid for it, and let him grow up with the country, as people say."

"Or start a new graveyard," suggested Bill.

"Well, he would be a fine subject—he, he!—to start a new graveyard with. My friend agreed to that, and I mentioned it to my son when he called, and he was quite willing to get the money he wanted in that way, and he is to come this afternoon and settle the matter."

"You don't want me for anything, then?" remarked Bill.

"Not now, William. You may call again, if you choose—say at four or five o'clock. After that wicked young man leaves the city, I may be able to do something nice for you. I have done a good stroke of business to-day, William."

Bill Yards hastened to board a street-car, and rode up to Mrs. Ames's. A suspicion that had been growing in his mind had become almost a certainty, and he was anxious to consult his friends.

He found Richard Ames at the door, just starting out.

"I have to go back to Santa Clara at once," said Dick, "and am in a hurry to get ready."

Bill begged him to come into the house for a

few minutes, as he had something of importance to tell him.

"It is about my partner, Sim Brattle," he said, when they were seated in the room with Mrs. Ames and Amy.

"Have you heard nothing of him yet?" asked Dick.

"Not a whisper, and I am worried about him. I'm afeared he has got into a scrape, and a bad one at that. I told you that he had been adopted by a rich old gen'leman."

"Quite an unreasonable story," said Dick.

"That's what he told me, and he said I must keep mum about it until he got settled. But I think I begin to see through it now. You were talking about a boy named Arthur Ames, who had been missin', but had turned up at last, and there was a heap o' money mixed up in the story. Well, the fact is that when I last saw Sim, and when he told me that yarn, he said that his name was Arthur Ames."

If a torpedo had exploded in the room, it could hardly have caused a greater sensation.

Dick jumped up, Amy screamed, and even Mrs. Ames was greatly excited.

"Why didn't you tell us this before?" asked Dick.

"I didn't rightly get hold of it when you were talkin'," replied Bill. "The idee come to me sorter slow, and didn't git fairly stuck in my craw until a bit ago."

"Arthur Ames must be dead, then, and this boy has been employed to personate him," said Mrs. Ames. "Who would have thought that after saving our lives he would do us such an injury?"

"Why, ma, he could not have known that he was hurting us," suggested Amy, "and I doubt if he really had any clear idea of what he was doing."

"You are right, Amy," said her brother, "and we ought not to blame him until we know more about the matter. The most important question is, where is he? Why do you think he has got into a scrape, Bill? What do you suppose has happened to him?"

Bill related as briefly as he could the particulars of his acquaintance with Cornelius Corum, including the story which that old man had lately told him, and which he could not help connecting with his friend, Sim Brattle.

"It seems to be clear enough," said Richard Ames. "Our uncle Augustus has used the lad for that purpose, and now he wants to get him out of the way. A man who could concoct such a swindle as that would not strongly object to committing a murder for the purpose of covering his tracks."

"That is a terrible charge," remarked Mrs. Ames, "and we ought not to make it unless we are sure that it is true."

"I can easily make sure of that. Tell me, Bill, exactly how your friend was dressed when you last saw him. Then I will see Mr. Brennan, and get a description of the boy who answered to the name of Arthur Ames before the referee."

Bill gave an accurate description of the appearance of his friend.

"Now," said Dick, "you must go back to Cornelius Corum, and try to find out when the

boy he spoke of is to leave the city. Then you must be at the Union Depot again at six, to see if your friend comes to meet you. By that time I hope we will know what to do."

This programme the lad followed as well as he could; but he was unsuccessful in his efforts to pump out of Cornelius Corum such information as he wanted.

That shrewd old money-grubber was even more elated than he had been when Bill last visited him, and was communicative enough as far as he chose to be, but could not be induced to go an inch further.

"It is all right, William," he said; "that bit of business has been carried out nicely, and everything is settled. My son came here, and he was much pleased with what I proposed to him, and I gave him his money in five new hundred-dollar bills, which I got on my friend's check, and he will attend to that little matter for my friend exactly as it ought to be attended to, I am sure."

"When will he leave town with that boy you was speakin' about?"

"Oh, I don't know. That was none of my business. Right away, of course. I suppose they are off and gone before this time. What do I care about it? That wicked young man is out of my way, and has promised me that he will not come back to trouble me for a long time, and the papers do say that there is going to be an Indian war out there."

"How long since he left this house?" inquired Bill, still bent on getting information.

"Not long. How you do ask questions! He was here but a short time. Let me see—"

A cloud came over Cornelius Corum's ugly face, and the bright and cheerful expression left it suddenly.

"I left him here alone a little while," said he. "He wanted me to go out and get one of those bills changed for him, as he was afraid he might be suspected of having stolen it. I was gone but a few minutes. It is not possible that he could have done any mischief in that time. Merciful heavens! I had not thought of it before."

The old man hastily tried the door of his safe, and found it locked. Then he opened some drawers and little closets in his desk, and found nothing out of the way there.

His face began to grow brighter, but he was not yet entirely satisfied.

He took a key from his pocket, and opened the door of his safe. Then he took a tin box from a shelf within, and carefully lifted the lid, turning his back upon his young visitor.

Suddenly he uttered a screech of horror and despair, and the empty box fell from his hands to the floor, and he would have fallen backward if Bill Yards had not come to his assistance.

"What is the matter?" asked the lad.

"Oh, the reprobate!—the scoundrel!—the infernal villain! He has robbed me! He has robbed his poor old father! He had a key to my safe, and I did not suspect it. What a blind fool I have been! And now I am ruined!"

The agony in the old man's face made Bill pity him; but something more than pity was needed.

"What did he take?" inquired the lad.

"Diamonds—the finest diamonds, emeralds and rubies—thousands of dollars' worth. Oh, I am ruined!"

"What train was he to go on? Let's stop him."

"He must be off before now. I told you all I know about that."

"Let's ketch him, then."

The old man jumped up. The lad's brisk and active manner had put new life into him.

"Yes, we must catch him," said he. "Will you help me? I want your help, William. You will serve me as well as a detective, and be cheaper. I will give you the fine pistol you had—that is, I will lend it to you—and I will get a warrant, or a requisition, or whatever it is, and we will follow him to Colorado—to Santa Clara—and we will get my jewels, and you shall be paid for your trouble, William—oh, yes, you shall be paid."

"That suits me to a dot!" exclaimed Bill.

"When are you goin' to start?"

"As soon as possible—to-morrow morning."

"All right, I will run down to the Union Depot, to see if my pardner has turned up, and will come back here to sleep."

"Be sure that you do, William, and come early."

The lad hurried to the depot, but with no hope of finding his friend. Blessed are they who expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed, and in that respect he was blessed.

He was about to leave the place, when he was startled by hearing his name shouted in a familiar tone.

"Hey, Bill!"

There are many Bills, and that cry might be heard any day on any street corner; but Bill Yards was sure that he knew the voice. He looked in the direction of the sound, and saw the face of his friend at the window of a car that was leaving the depot.

The next instant the face suddenly disappeared, and the train rattled away, far out of the lad's reach.

But he was sure that he had seen his friend, and was more than ever determined to follow Birch Corum westward.

He hastened to Mrs. Ames's house, and found the family in a high state of excitement. Dick had seen his mother's lawyer, Mr. Brennan, and had learned from him that the description of Arthur Ames exactly corresponded with that of Sim Brattles. Bill added to this the fact that he had seen his friend leaving the city on a westward bound train, and Richard Ames declared that he would lose no time in endeavoring to get possession of Sim and bring him back to St. Louis.

Bill related his afternoon's adventure at Cornelius Corum's, and said that he would start for Colorado with that gentleman in the morning.

"Go ahead," said Dick, "and I will be right on your heels."

CHAPTER IX.

TROUBLE IN A HAPPY HOME.

THE "Happy Home" was not the only hotel in Santa Clara; but it was the best of the two bad ones. It had originally been styled the

"Miners' and Ranchmen's Happy Home;" but the mining business had "petered out," and the name was too long to suit the notions of the ranchmen; so it had dwindled to "Happy Home."

The proprietor, Dan Sprawl, found it a dry and lonesome business waiting for better times, as visitors were scarce outside of the customers of his bar, and he was rejoiced when two strangers alighted from the stage and inscribed their names in the dirty register that lay on his bar counter.

The names were these:

"C. Corum, St. Louis."

"Willyum Yards, Esquire, New York."

The latter inscription was completed, after considerable labor, by a rather young gentleman, with auburn hair and a snub nose, who stood back and surveyed it with an air of triumph.

A short and fat man, with a red face and a redder nose, and with a general appearance of having seen better days a long time ago, who had been looking over the lad's shoulder, stepped back, and gazed at him admiringly.

"Is that your name he asked."

"Yes," replied Bill.

"All of it yours?"

"Of course it is."

"And you have come all the way from New York. Mebbe you're a lawyer, and are gwine to stick up a shingle here."

"Not much. I'm a spekulator."

"Pockets full o' rocks, I reckon. Wal, young gentleman, I've got a mine to sell—fust class gold mine, and all the ore that ain't gold is silver, 'ceptin' a streak o' quicksilver that runs through the lead."

"Say, now, Baldy," remarked Dan Sprawl, a big six-footer, "I don't want you to be givin' the guests of this yere hotel too much of yer gab."

"Tain't offen we see sech a fine young gentleman as this," remarked the man who was addressed as Baldy. "Mebbe he mought want to treat."

"Not if I know myself," said Bill. "I belong to the Business Men's 'Ciety fur the Purvention of Treatin'."

By this time the room had filled with loungers, who were inspecting the strangers closely.

"See here, fellers," said Baldy, "this fine young gentleman from the great metrapulis says he won't treat."

"I reckon he will have to, or shed some of his feathers," remarked a man who was even bigger than Dan Sprawl, and a howl of assent told Bill Yards that there was trouble in store for him. He looked to Cornelius Corum for help, but only saw the old man's coat tails as he went out at the door.

The next moment the lad was picked up, passed over the heads of the crowd, and seated on the counter.

"I reckon we've got to hev suthin' to amuse us," remarked Baldy.

"Oh, I'll amuse you fast enough," said Bill.

"W'ot kin you do that's interestin', young spekulator?"

"Jest make room fur me on that floor, and I'll give you a song an' dance."

In a few minutes a space was cleared, and Bill pulled off his coat, and rolled up the bottoms of his trousers. After a little preliminary shuffle, to limber his feet, he began the entertainment with this ditty, which he sung in a shrill but clear tenor:

"My name is Willyum Yards,
And I am from New York;
On fun I allers go my pile,
But not a cent on work."

He walked around the space reserved for him, in the most approved style of the "variety artist," executed a breakdown that called forth plenty of applause, and proceeded to sing his second verse:

"I ain't much on the drink,
Nor am I on the fight;
But when it comes to song an' dance,
My head an' heels are light."

"Now fur the third verse, gentlemen," he said, when he had again performed his walk-around and breakdown.

"I've come to Santa Clara,
To have some sport, you know;
Fur it is jest the liveliest town
This side of Jericho."

For an encore he repeated the first verse, and when the storm of applause excited by this performance had subsided, he treated his audience to "Wait Till the Moonlight Shines on the Water."

There was a general outburst of enthusiasm, and then a grand rush to the bar.

"That's the chap for my money," exclaimed the giant of the party. "Anybody what treads on his toes will hev to buck ag'inst Bob Slater."

"It's as good as strikin' a new lead in an old mine," remarked Dan Sprawl, "and that boy kin hang out at this hotel as long as he wants to."

"Hurrah fur the Wild Warbler of the Santa Clara Walley!" shouted Baldy. "Whar's the old man, now? Let's have him in, and see what he's up to."

Bill Yards had sought Cornelius Corum, and found him looking at the scene from the outside through a crack in the wall, and persuaded him that it would be safe to enter the hotel. When he came in he was greeted with inquiries as to his business and destination.

"My business is square enough, gentlemen," replied the old man, as his presence of mind came back to him. "I shall want help, and am willing to pay for it. I am looking for the sheriff."

"I'm the sheriff," said Dan Sprawl. "I was elected three years ago, and nobody has been elected since then; so I reckon I hold on. But thar ain't no jail nor no court, and the county business has kinder fell through."

"What are you sheriff for, then?"

"Wal, I mought kerlect the taxes, ef thar was any taxes to kerlect; but since the diggin's dried up, and this town has sorter faded out, we don't bother about taxes. What do you want of a sheriff, old gen'leman?"

"I have a warrant and a requisition for a man who stole some valuable jewels in St. Louis, and who has come out here."

"Who is he?" asked Sprawl, looking around at the loungers rather suspiciously.

"His name is Birch Corum."

"What! Blackhawk?"

This name was repeated by so many voices that the old man was bewildered.

"The man I speak of," he said, "is a sort of cattle-trader."

"Cattle-trader!" exclaimed Bob Slater. "Cattle-thief you had better say. Road-agent—highway robber—whatever you choose to call him—you can't give him too hard a name. He's the worst egg in the basket. Thar's plenty besides you, stranger, who would like to git hold of him."

"I offer a reward of one thousand dollars for his capture and the recovery of the jewels," said Cornelius Corum.

"Tain't enough, stranger. Thar's men who would give more'n that for him, dead or alive, and dead is the only way to fetch him. He is a durned sight more likely to ketch than to git caught."

"The fact is," said Dan Sprawl, "that none of us hanker arter the job of buckin' ag'inst Blackhawk and his gang, and we are only glad if they will leave us alone. They used to take this town every now and then, and make things lively. We had a bank yere oncet, but they cleaned it out, and that made an end of the bank. Of late days we don't dar' to run as much as a faro-bank, for fear they mought light in on it. The bottom fact of the matter is, stranger, that our poverty purtects us."

Cornelius Corum looked around in dismay. The prospect of success in the pursuit of his jewels appeared to be very faint.

"There are men enough about here," he said, "and I should think that there ought to be some among them who are brave enough to hunt that rascal down."

"Yere's yer hunter!" shouted Baldy. "Look at me! Jest put me on the trail! I'm the man fur yer money! Gimme five hundred dollars to start on, an' I'll light out arter Blackhawk in less'n an hour."

A storm of jeers and hisses followed this offer, as the crowd were clearly of the opinion that Baldy's lighting out with that sum of money would result in his never returning.

"As fur bein' brave," said one of the party, "I reckon we're as brave as most folks; but men as hain't got nothin' don't fret much about the losin's of them as has. Thar's plenty of us as would be glad to tackle Blackhawk and his gang, ef he should give us cause, and ef we could git a fair chance at him."

This sentiment was received with approbation, and Cornelius Corum encouraged it by directing Sprawl to produce his poison.

After several drinks had been absorbed, the crowd became enthusiastic, and boisterously proclaimed their intention of organizing for the capture of Blackhawk and his band.

"I wish we could git a sight at 'em now!" shouted Baldy. "Wouldn't we salivate the snoozers!"

The galloping of horses was heard on the street, and the noisy loungers suddenly became silent, looking at each other as if they were not easy in their minds.

The galloping quickly came nearer, a number of horses stopped at the hotel, and a sharp command was heard.

"Blackhawk!" shouted Baldy, and there was a general rush for doors and windows.

But all the avenues of escape were stopped by the muzzles of rifles, and three masked men, with revolvers in their hands, marched into the room.

"Sit down, gentlemen, and hold up your hands!" ordered the leader, and this command was instantly obeyed.

Bill Yards, who happened to be standing at the corner of the bar, dodged down behind the counter, where he burrowed among some empty kegs and bottles, and covered himself with an old sack. Cornelius Corum, seeing no escape for himself, crouched down in a corner, and hid his face with his hands.

It would have been amusing to an outsider to observe the quiet and docility with which that lately boisterous crowd seated themselves upon benches, boxes and barrels, and meekly held up their hands, while the raiders "went through" them rapidly and thoroughly.

A few, such as Baldy, who were sure to have nothing, were skipped in the search, and the gleanings were so small that they called forth exclamations of disgust. The only "haul" worth speaking of was Dan Sprawl's money-drawer, which he opened under the persuasion of a revolver. Even on the person of Cornelius Corum nothing of consequence was found, as he had previously concealed his valuables outside of the building.

But the old man's sachel was quickly broken open, and the leader took from it some folded papers, which he glanced at and stuffed them into his pocket, bursting into a harsh laugh.

"I sha'n't trouble you Santa Clara cusses again," he said. "I might as well shear a polecat for wool. Santa Clara is the poorest, driest, meanest, mangiest, sneakin'est, flea-begotten and God-forsaken hole this side of the Mississippi, and it has got down to a thousand-foot level beneath my notice. Come, boys!"

And Blackhawk and his band left the "Happy Home," mounted their horses and clattered away.

CHAPTER X.

TURNING THE TABLES.

A HORSEMAN rode up to a small tenement on the side of a hill, at a distance of several miles from Santa Clara.

The tenement might more properly be styled a "shebang" than a house, as it was partly shanty, and partly dug out, a portion of it being nothing more than a hole in the hill. It had an open shutter and a broken door, but no window.

Behind the horseman rode a well-dressed boy, who got down at a word from a man in the saddle, who also dismounted and hitched his horse.

The broken door was opened by a small and lean man, ragged, dirty, dark-skinned and with an ill favored countenance.

"Hi, Birch!" he exclaimed. "So you've got back at last. What sort of a kid is this you've brought?"

"This is a young friend of mine from St. Louis," replied the visitor, who was no other than Birch Corum. "Come in, Sim, and rest."

The two entered the shebang, and found the interior quite as comfortable as the outside promised.

"What have you got to eat, Yarrup?" asked Birch. "I am as hungry as a wolf."

"Deer meat and corn-pone."

"That will do. Trot it out."

The provender was not very dainty, as to quality or cleanliness; but the two riders were hungry enough to make no complaint, and they ate heartily.

In the course of the meal, Birch Corum gave the proprietor of the shebang such particulars as he chose to give of his trip to the East. He said that he had been "cleaned out by the St. Louis sharps," but had managed to "raise a stake," and had returned to make up for his losses "by honest labor."

"How are the boys getting on?" he asked.

"They've been tolerable quiet since you've been gone," replied Yarrup. "A few things has been picked up yere and thar; but they tried to stop a stage on the valley road, and made a mess of it, and I reckon that since then they've been waitin' fur you. They'll be lively enough when you git to 'em, you may bet. Air you goin' to take the kid over thar?"

"No; not yet, anyhow. He is a sharp lad, but I have heard that he is a little too sharp, and it may not be safe for him to mix with the gang yet awhile. I will leave him with you for the present, Yarrup. You can take care of him, and perhaps you can make him useful. I will pay you for his keep, anyway."

Against this arrangement Sim Brattle protested vigorously. It did not suit his expectation, in the least that he should be kept a prisoner in that dark and dirty hovel, in the charge of such an unpleasant person as Yarrup.

"You promised me, Mr. Birch," he said, "that when I got out here I might learn to hunt and kill Injuns."

"You must have patience, young chap. There are no Injuns to kill just now, and you are hardly fit for the kind of hunting we do. You had better settle down as you are told to, and be mighty durned thankful that you are no worse off."

Birch Corum rode away, after some whispered conversation with Yarrup, leaving Sim Brattle sulky and discontented.

As Sim had foreseen, he was not likely to have a pleasant life with Yarrup, and he soon made up his mind that he would not endure it long.

The proprietor of the shebang ordered him to take off his coat, relieved him of the little change he had left, led him out of doors, and set him to chopping wood, a species of work to which Sim was not accustomed.

Yarrup lighted a pipe and sat down to oversee the job, at the same time favoring the young fellow with a lecture on his position and duties.

"All you've got to do is to mind me," said the lecturer. "If you don't mind me, there's trouble ahead fur you. I've heerd that you was a leetle too sharp fur some folks at St. Louis; but

you've come to a kentry whar that kind o' sharpness don't count. You don't go out no-whar, 'ceptin' along 'ith me, and you'd better remember, all the while, that a rifle-ball kin travel a powerful sight faster than you kin, and I'm told that it won't make much differ ef you should happen to git knocked over. So you see it won't do to try to run off. Ef you should happen to git loose, whar'd you go to? This is a lone, wild kentry, and thar's b'ars an' wolves an' wildcats till you cain't rest."

Sim remembered that he had ridden a considerable distance in that region without seeing any such menagerie beasts, and he was not afraid of them. He had a wholesome fear of getting lost in the hills, and did not doubt that Yarrup would be willing enough to send a bullet after him; but he was strong in the determination to escape when he could see his way a little clearer.

After a wretched supper, a rough night's sleep on a bare floor, and a very poor excuse for breakfast, this determination became stronger. In addition to his desire to "make it hot" for Augustus Ames and his wife, he wanted to "get even" with Birch Corum, who had put him in such a hole and such company.

His determination became a settled intention shortly after that bad breakfast.

He was ordered to go out and cut some more wood; but he grumbled, and hesitated about obeying. Yarrup picked up a piece of rawhide lariat, and shook it at him.

"Yarrup rhymes with larrup," he said, "and you'll ketch it ef you don't mind."

Sim inwardly resolved that if that man should strike him he would never rest until he got even; but he thought it best to choke down his temper and wait until his turn came.

"Pull off your coat!" ordered Yarrup.

As Sim started to obey this order he edged toward the corner in which he had seen Yarrup's rifle standing. He knew that it was capped, and presumed that it was loaded.

The next instant he grabbed the rifle, cocked it, and aimed it at his ragged and dirty jailer.

"You durned fool!" exclaimed that individual. "It ain't loaded!"

"That's the very kind that always kills folks," replied Sim, as the idea flashed across his mind that if it was not loaded Yarrup would be sure to make a rush and seize it.

But Yarrup did nothing of the sort, and seemed to be strongly disinclined to gaze at the muzzle of the weapon.

"Walk straight out of here, now," ordered Sim, "and point your toes toward Santa Clara, or I'll blow a hole right through you."

"You wouldn't really shoot me, would you?" asked the owner of the rifle, as he edged away.

"Wouldn't I though? You can just bet your last rag I would. I tell you, old seed, I'm desprit, and I mean business all the time. I'm goin' to git out of this scrape, if it takes a funeral. March right along, or I'll shoot as quick as winkin'."

It needed but a glance at the lad's determined face to show that he meant what he said, and that he was dangerous. Yarrup backed out of the door.

"Won't you please shut up the house, young gen'tleman?" he asked, as Sim followed him.

"Shut nothin'! There ain't a cent's worth to steal, and no white man would stick his head into that hole if he could help it. You just turn square around and march toward Santa Clara, or you'll git a dose."

"Santa Clara is ever so fur from here," sulkily replied Yarrup, as he obeyed this order.

"I don't care how far it is. Point your nose in that direction, and follow it right along!"

Yarrup scrambled down the bridle-path that led to his hut, and took a westerly course, Sim Brattle keeping at a distance of about ten paces in his rear.

Every now and then the leader partly turned or looked over his shoulder, and every time he saw the lad's eyes fastened on him, and the rifle aimed at him.

He was getting uneasy, and the weapon in the boy's hands made him nervous.

"I wish you'd pint that thing some other way," he said. "It mought go off."

"You said it wasn't loaded," replied Sim.

"A gun is danger's, some folks say, without lock, stock or barrel, and I reckon you hain't been used to foolin' with weapons."

"You had better not bother me, then, or do anythin' to startle me, or you'll be to blame for the accidents."

"You mought let the hammer down, anyhow. 'Tain't no use to keep the gun cocked."

Sim considered this point, and thought he might grant the request.

"I will let it down," he said; "but I can lift it again as quick as you'd say snap. So you had better mind your eye, and keep your nose pointed for Santa Clara."

Yarrup led the way by a faint bridle-path that seemed to lead to nowhere in particular, except that its general direction was westward, and that took the travelers down hills and up, but mainly up, through ravines and gullies where Sim was obliged to mind his steps and carry his rifle carefully. But he never failed to keep a watchful eye on his leader, and to be ready to draw a bead on him if there should be any sign of treachery.

When this sort of work had continued more than an hour, and there were still no indications of reaching anything that looked like a settlement, Sim began to grow uneasy.

"Are you takin' me toward Santa Clara, you dodrotted old seed?" he asked.

"Of course I am," gruffly replied Yarrup.

"It don't look as if we are ever goin' to git in sight of anywhere."

"I'm a-doing the best I kin. It's a long way to Santa Clara."

"I want you to strike into the big road."

"This is the nighest way to the big road," replied Yarrup, and he began to whistle.

"What are you whistling for?" demanded Sim.

"Reckon I want to do suthin' to pass the time."

Sim was suspicious of the whistling; but he did not perceive that he had any good excuse for stopping it, and it went on until something else happened.

Three men suddenly sprung out from among

the rocks and Sim Brattle was seized from behind and disarmed.

Before him stood Birch Corum, with a puzzled look on his face.

Then the lad knew that Yarrup had led him into an ambush, and had whistled to call up the men who captured him.

CHAPTER XI.

LIFE OR DEATH.

"WHAT does all this mean, Yarrup?" asked Birch Corum, looking from Sim Brattle to the man in whose keeping he had been left.

"Yor jest take that young rattlesnake inside, and I'll tell you all about it."

Sim was led through an opening in the rocks to a large hole that proved to be the entrance to a considerable cavern.

Inside, under the arched but irregular roof of stone, was quite a comfortable arrangement of blankets, skins and rude articles of furniture with a variety of weapons, utensils and miscellaneous articles. Five men were sitting or lounging about in the cavern, besides those who came in with Sim.

The lad was seated in the midst of them, and Yarrup had told how his young prisoner had captured him, and how he, in his turn, had turned the tables on his driver by leading him into an ambush. There were a few exaggerations in this narrative, inserted for the benefit of the narrator; but it was, on the whole, a reasonably fair account of the transaction.

It was listened to with occasional bursts of laughter, and now and then an appreciative oath; but Birch Corum found himself divided between an inclination to be amused and a desire to be angry.

"I told you, Yarrup," he said, "that the boy was a sharp one, and your story proves that he was much too sharp for you. He has earned the right to be quit of you if sharpness is worth anything; but it seems to me that he is just a little too sharp to live."

"The on'y way I could keep him 'ud be by slittin' his windpipe," remarked Yarrup. "Nothin' short o' that 'ud keep him from runnin' away."

"Where was he trying to get to?"

"Why, to Santa Clara."

"Great snakes! he would have starved to death there, judging by the last view I had of the old hole."

Sim began to believe that he had got into a bad box, and thought it high time to put in a word for himself.

"I only asked him to take me to Santa Clara," he said, "because I thought I would find you there, Mr. Birch."

This statement was a little too much for Yarrup.

"Ef that ain't the cheekiest young riptyle that ever was foaled," said he, "may I never see hog an' hominy ag'in!"

Such an assertion on the part of Yarrup was considered as having the force of a solemn oath, and the feeling was decidedly against Sim.

"It's a fact, though," the lad insisted. "Yor told me, Mr. Birch, that I might learn to hunt and to kill Injuns."

"I told you, you young imp, that you must

have patience and stay with Yarrup. But here you are, and the question is, what shall we do with you? You could never do us the least bit of good, and the chances are that you might do us a heap of harm. It is my opinion, as I said afore, that you are 'most too sharp to live."

This speech, although apparently directed to Sim Brattle, was in reality addressed by Birch Corum to his comrades, and it was received quite too favorably for the lad's peace of mind.

"Thar's on'y one thing to be done with him," said Yarrup, "and that is to strangle him."

"We must get at the sentiments of the party on that subject," remarked Birch. "Gentlemen, here's a young rattler that has got into the wrong hole, and the question is, what shall we do with him? There's no chance for half-way measures with such a snappin' turtle of a circumstance as this is. We have either got to keep him, or make an end of him. Yarrup says that the easiest and surest trick will be to strangle him, and that is my opinion, knowing the young rascal as I do, and knowing that he won't be missed by those who sent him out here. But I will put it to a vote of the party."

"Ain't I allowed to say a word about this little game?" inquired Sim.

"Not a twitter. Now, gentlemen, all who are in favor of twisting the neck of this bantam will signify the same by saying ay."

The ayes were vigorous enough.

"Contrary, no."

The noes seemed to be as numerous as the ayes, though not so noisy; but Birch at once decided in favor of the ayes, and the prospect for Sim Brattle was a dark one.

"I ain't sure, Cap, that that's a fair vote," said a tall and gaunt man, who seemed inclined to take the lad's part. "I call for a standin' vote."

This was held to be a parliamentary proceeding, and those in favor of Sim's immediate execution were directed to stand up.

Five men stood up, including Yarrup.

A call for the other side brought only four men to their feet.

"Decided dead against the young scamp," said Birch. "I hope Cimmarone Joe is satisfied."

"I ain't, though," exclaimed Sim, pointing at Yarrup. "Did that old seed vote?"

"Yes, he voted."

"Well, gentlemen, I guess I've got every bit as good a right to vote as he had, and I vote—no."

He jumped up and boldly ranged himself by the side of his supporters.

This piece of audacity did not fail to excite the admiration of the rough men for whose benefit it was intended, and a murmur of applause drowned the savage remark that Birch Corum began to make.

After all, he was but one member of the band, though the leader, and his voice went for no more than another in a council of war. The point was freely discussed, and it was decided that Yarrup, being actually an outsider, though in some respects an assistant to the band, had no better right to vote than the prisoner had.

"We stand four to four, then," said Birch.

"It's a tie, and how are you going to settle it?"

"I'll tell you what to do, Cap," suggested Cimmarone Joe. "Supposin' you let me buy the youngster."

"Buy him? What do you mean?"

"Buy his life of you. I'll shoot for him, any way you want."

"Well, I don't care what becomes of the cuss, so's I get him off my hands, and he is fixed to do no harm."

"If I win him, Birch, I'll engage to keep him safe and sure."

"You might as well engage to take care of a kicking mule or a bucking broncho. Have it your own way though. I will give you a chance for the chap, if you will shoot on my terms, and if the game is agreeable to the rest of the party."

"What's your terms, Cap?"

"That you shall shoot a half-dollar out of the chap's fingers, at a hundred steps. The boy to back against a tree, and to hold the half dollar so's it just fairly shows above his head."

"That's a rough deal, Cap, considerin' what kind of a mark I've got; but I can do it, if the boy will hold steady."

"It is settled, then, if the company has no objection. You shall shoot for the boy, and may have him if you win. If you lose, Yarrup may take him and twist his neck."

"You bet I'll hold steady," said Sim, entering into the spirit of the thing with the eagerness of a boy at his first base-ball match.

He did not entirely comprehend the arrangement that had been made, but perceived that his life, if not his liberty, was to depend upon the marksmanship of Cimmarone Joe.

He was soon to learn that this was not the only risk in the venture, but his life was more immediately in danger, as there was a pretty strong chance that a miss shot might kill him outright.

The entire company left the cavern, and descended to a shaded and quiet valley, where Cimmarone Joe selected the tree that was to serve as a backing for his mark. From this tree a hundred paces were stepped off in the direction which he pointed out.

He then led Sim Brattle to the tree, and placed him with his back against it.

"I reckon I had better tie you," he said, "to keep you as steady as possible."

He passed a leather strap under the lad's arms, and belted it around the tree securely.

"I hope you ain't goin' to kill me, mister," said Sim, looking at him wistfully.

"I want to save your life, youngster," was the kind reply, "and you must help me all you can. I mean to do my best; and my best is as good as any other man's; but the shot is a dangerous one, and you ought to know that. Take this half dollar, now."

Sim took the coin, and held it with his thumb and finger as Joe directed him, so that the lower edge was about even with the crown of his head.

"Your life depends on this," said Joe, "and all you have to do is to hold that half dollar steady. Can you do it?"

"I guess that'll do to bet on," replied Sim.

"May I shut my eyes?"

"Yes, and you ought to shut them. Don't

think of anything in the world, now, but hold-in' that half dollar just so."

Cimmarone Joe walked to his station, and examined his rifle carefully.

"I mean to have fair play here, or thar'll be trouble," he said, looking around at the bystanders. "If any man makes a noise, or stirs so as to bother me, let him look out for himself. I mean this warnin' partic'larly for Yarrup."

"I'll look out fur your side of the game, Joe," said a stalwart six-footer, as he cocked his revolver.

The marksman raised his rifle, and took a careful aim. The boy stood like a statue against the tree, and the sharpest eyes could not detect the slightest motion of the coin, or the least quiver of his fingers.

The report of the rifle rung through the valley, and Sim uttered a sharp cry as his hand dropped down.

"He's brained him!" shouted Yarrup, pointing eagerly at the patch of blood on the lad's forehead.

"The boy is mine," replied Cimmarone Joe, as he walked leisurely toward the tree.

The bullet had chipped off the tip of Sim's finger, had sent the coin spinning, and had bedded itself in the tree. After a search the battered half-dollar was found in the leaves.

"I hope you are all satisfied," said Cimmarone Joe, as he unbuckled the strap.

"It was a good shot," said Birch Corum, "and I may say for the youngster that he earned his life by the nerve he showed."

All seemed to be satisfied, except Yarrup, who sulked and said nothing, and all returned to the cavern.

Cimmarone Joe took Sim into the back part of the den, where light came in through a rift in the rock, and tied up his finger, at the same time administering a little lecture to him.

"You are my boy now," said Joe, "because I saved your life."

"I know that," replied Sim, and his tone and manner showed that he appreciated the fact.

"I have won you," continued Joe; "but you helped to play the game, and I know that thar's good stuff in you. You are a smart lad, but I am told that you are a little too sharp. What I want is that you shall be just sharp enough, and then you'll keep out o' trouble. You must go easy about these diggin's, and don't be too durned brash. Mind what I tell you, and don't light out o' this until I give you leave, and you'll be all hunky. I'm kinder 'sponsible for you, as you know, and I want you to stick to the line I lay down, and you'll allers find a friend in Cimmarone Joe."

"Am I goin' to learn to hunt and to kill Injuns?" asked Sim.

"I'll teach you to shoot, and when I go up into the Gunnison country you'll find Injuns enough, and mebbe a little too plenty."

CHAPTER XII.

SANTA CLARA ON THE WAR-PATH.

WHEN Birch Corum, otherwise known as Blackhawk, rode away with his band from Dan Sprawl's "Happy Home," no attempt was made to pursue them.

There was a general feeling of relief when they were gone, and the citizens of Santa Clara burst out in a tumult of indignation. Their anger, however, was not caused by the losses they had sustained or the indignities they had suffered at the hands of the raiders, but by the slight that had been put upon the town by Blackhawk in his parting speech. They could stand anything but an insult to their beloved burgh.

Bill Yards, emerging from his concealment under the counter, shook up Cornelius Corum, who had been dazed by the occurrence, and the old man slipped out at the door to look after his valuables. He found them safe, and restored them to his person.

As he re-entered the room, he was saluted by the landlord.

"That was Birch Corum," said Sprawl. "Why didn't you ketch him?"

But the old man was examining his sachel which the raiders had rummaged, and his answer was a howl of wrath.

"They have carried off my warrant, my requisition!" he exclaimed.

The crowd burst into a roar of laughter, led by Dan Sprawl.

"I'm glad to find suthin' to laugh at," said the landlord, "and that's the best joke of the season. That a man should come and steal the warrant that calls for his arrest is a little too rich for every day victuals. He knew what it was, stranger, and he and his pards are havin' a jolly circus over it, you bet!"

"If it is of no more use to him than it was to me, he is welcome to it," said Mr. Corum, after a moment's reflection. "I could do nothing with it in this country."

"That's a solid fact, old gentleman. If you can't get him without a warrant you can't get him with one. Thar's plenty o' folks would be glad to put the'r clutches on him, without a scrap of writin' or a word from a sheriff, and would string him up on sight ef he'd give 'em a chance. If you'd offer a reward, I reckon he'd give himself up quick, and then would take himself off as soon as he'd got the money."

Cornelius Corum, who had not conceived a high respect for the men about him, declared that no people who had a proper care for their own safety and that of their property, would permit such a rascal to roam about the country, plundering and murdering as he pleased.

"Look a-here, stranger," said the giant, who had announced himself as Bob Slater. "The less chin music o' that sort you give us, the better fur your wholesome. We know our faults an' failin's, but we don't allow any old smoked herrin's of your size and built to go about pickin' flaws outen us. Regardin' Blackhawk and his pards, the time has come fur the solid citizens of Santa Clara to do suthin'."

A murmur of applause, not loud, but deep, showed that the giant was giving words to the prevailing sentiment of the crowd.

"We are long-sufferin' an' slow to anger, as the Scriptor says," he continued; "but thar's some things we can't an' won't stand. We've stuck to Santa Clara through good times an' bad; we've knowed its ups an' downs; but we never yet struck sech a low level that we wasn't

ready to everlastingly go fur the ha'r of any high-headed galoot or set o' sheep thieves who dar'd to tell us to our faces that Santa Clara is the driest, dirtiest, meanest, mangiest, sneak-in'est an' most God-forsaken hole this side o' the Mississippi."

"That's sol Hurray fur Slater!" shouted Baldy, and a chorus of yells and ejaculations declared that the giant had struck the right lead this time, with no shadow of a doubt.

Other speakers followed Slater, and the burden of their remarks was that the people there present might submit to being bullied, plundered and driven over; but an insult to the dignity of Santa Clara was something which they could not and would not endure, and for which nothing but blood could atone.

Having settled this point, they proceeded to discuss the ways and means of beginning and carrying on the campaign, and here they found themselves, as Bob Slater expressed it, "up a stump."

They could not agree upon a leader, and they felt the need of some men who were personally interested in hunting down the outlaws.

"If Dick Ames was here," said Slater, "we mought make a start tol'able sudden."

"Who is Dick Ames?" asked Mr. Corum.

"A young man who manages the Kingpin Ranch, up on the Ferida range. He's gone to St. Louis to see his folks."

"I know him," spoke up Bill Yards. "I saw him in St. Louis, and he'll be comin' along right soon, if he ain't out here a'ready."

"Bully fur you, hub!" exclaimed Slater. "Seems like you are bound to git in on time, all the while. He is a right peert young feller, is Dick Ames, and Mr. Lumley, who owns the Kingpin Ranch, has told him to spend what he pleases to clean out Blackhawk and his buzzards. He'll be glad enough to jump in, when he knows that Santa Clara has took holt of the job."

"That's jist the game he wants to chip into," remarked Bill Yards.

A horse stopped at the "Happy Home," and the next moment Dick Ames entered the bar-room.

Attired in a blue flannel shirt, heavy corduroy trousers tucked into tall boots, and a broad felt hat, with a belt that held two revolvers and a knife, he was quite different in appearance from the neat young gentleman Bill had met in St. Louis, but was no less a fine specimen of fresh and vigorous manhood.

He greeted heartily all who were present, and fastened on Bill Yards at once.

"Here you are, Bill, my boy," said he. "I am glad to see that you are right side up with care. Have you heard anything of either of our birds?"

"One of 'em struck this town a while ago, and struck it pretty hard," replied Bill. "But these gen'lemen can tell you more about that little tea party than I can."

The men of Santa Clara were quite willing to tell the story, and Dick Ames was speedily informed of all the facts connected with the recent raid, and of their intention to awake from their lethargy and punish the "soothless

insulters" who had given such a shock to the dignity of Santa Clara.

"I am glad to hear that you are going to work in earnest at last," he said, "and hope you will stick to your good resolutions. I am quite as keen on the scent as any of you, and propose to start on the trail as soon as possible. I will bring eight men, well armed, from the Kingpin Ranch, and Santa Clara ought to furnish a dozen. If any money is needed, Mr. Lumley will supply it."

It was agreed that the start should be made at an early hour the next morning, and Dick Ames invited Bill Yards and Mr. Corum to accompany him to his ranch, an invitation which they gladly accepted, as Bill delighted in the company of his friend, and the old man was not at all desirous of spending a night among the rough population of Santa Clara.

They were obliged to be up and away long before daylight in the morning—a necessity that was very disagreeable to Mr. Corum, but "nuts" to Bill Yards, who regarded himself as fairly launched on a career of adventure.

When Dick Ames and his party reached the "Happy Home," they found the Santa Clara battalion ready to move, making twenty men in all, not counting Bill Yards and Baldy, both of whom were sure that they ought to count.

The force was provisioned and ammunitioned for a possible campaign of several days. Dick Ames was chosen as captain and Bob Slater as lieutenant, and they set out for the hills, leaving behind Cornelius Corum, who was not inclined to undergo the dangers and exposures of the expedition.

They were destined to have better luck and an easier time than they expected.

Shortly after noon they halted for dinner, and Baldy and another set out on foot to scout around their temporary camp, and make sure that the coast was clear of enemies.

Soon they came running back in a state of high excitement, and the story they told raised a similar excitement in the camp.

They had ascended a ridge a few rods away, and from its crest had looked down into a ravine where they saw three men eating and drinking, their horses picketed and feeding near them.

One of these men, they were willing to swear, was Birch Corum, otherwise known as Blackhawk, and the others must be members of his band.

Elated by this unexpected good fortune, Dick Ames and the Santa Clarans at once took measures to effect the capture of these wandering outlaws.

After posting the greater portion of his men so that they commanded three sides of Birch Corum's camp, Dick Ames made a circuit with the rest, and reached the opposite side of the ravine. The arrangement was that when he got in position the others should close in on the camp, and he would summon the party to surrender.

This plan was carried out successfully. The party in the ravine had finished their dinner and were enjoying themselves with their pipes and some flat bottles, when a stone rattling

down from the ledge at his right attracted Birch Corum's attention.

He jumped up, reaching for his rifle, just as Dick Ames hailed him from the ledge.

"Drop that, and throw up your hands!" ordered the young leader. "You are surrounded by twenty-five men, and there is no use in trying to resist."

Birch Corum looked around, and saw that he was covered by rifles from both sides of the ravine, while armed men were advancing upon him from the right and left.

"All right!" he said. "We're your mutton."

There was one of the party of three who did not think so. Perhaps he had not been drinking as heavily as his companions. He dashed away and was soon lost to sight among the rocks and bushes, though several shots were fired after him.

"I don't know who you are or what you want," said Birch, as his captors closed in upon him. "If you want to go through us, you will be welcome to all the money you find."

"That is not the sort of game we are playing," replied Dick. "I believe you are Birch Corum."

"That's my name, for a fact. Anything against it?"

"A little. You also go by the name of Blackhawk."

"Not if I know myself. The name I was christened with is good enough for me."

"You were in Santa Clara yesterday, and robbed a number of men at the 'Happy Home.'"

"Not much. I reckon you have got the wrong pig by the ear, stranger. I'm a poor but honest miner, and so is my partner here."

"We are going to take you to Santa Clara, and give you a chance to prove your character. I assure you that you shall have a fair trial."

"That's all I ask, stranger," said Birch, as he submitted to being tied, and cheerfully prepared to accompany his captors.

Bill Yards approached this important prisoner as they were about to mount. The lad was bursting with anxiety to learn the fate of Sim Brattle.

"Say, mister, w'ot's become o' that boy you brought out from St. Louis?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dick, "tell us how to get hold of him, and we may see a way to help you out of this scrape."

"I wonder who you take me for, anyhow," replied Birch, looking at them with an air of childlike innocence.

"We take you for Birch Corum, who robbed his father of a box of jewels in St. Louis, and brought away from there a boy named Sim Brattle."

"You are a little too much for me, strangers," said Birch; "and I reckon we had better ride on to Santa Clara, and settle this matter."

CHAPTER XIII.

SIM IN A SCRAPE.

SIM BRATTLE settled down to his new life, under the direction of Cimmarone Joe, very quietly and obediently. The prospect of "getting even" with Birch Corum seemed to be fading, and still more distant was the prospect of

"making it hot" for Mr. and Mrs. Augustus Ames, in St. Louis; but he was to learn to shoot, and in time he would go up into the Gunnison country among the "Injuns," and what more could any young fellow of reasonable ambition ask for?

But his apprenticeship was not likely to be a very pleasant experience, judging by the way it began.

He was obliged to bring wood and water, and generally to do the drudgery of the camp. Although he was not yet allowed to act as cook to the band, he was told that he would soon be promoted to that position, and in the meantime was compelled to wash their rude dishes and cooking utensils.

This was not a bit like hunting deer and killing "Injuns," and when Sim laid down that night, on his hard bed of rock covered with leaves and a blanket, he was already weary of this style of seeking adventures.

In the morning, when he was called upon to face more tasks of wood-gathering, water-fetching, and washing and cleaning, he was quite disgusted, and again he began to think seriously of making his escape.

There promised to be nothing to break the monotony of the morning's routine of drinking, smoking, card-playing, and lounging about, with an occasional quarrel over the cards, until Birch Corum announced his intention of going out on a "cruise."

"Rations seem to be getting scarce," he said, "and I had better take a couple of men and pick up a sheep or two, unless we should run across some better game. We may take a notion to scout around Soda Spring, and see what show there is for making a strike in that quarter."

He selected two members of the band to accompany him, and told them to get ready, while he stepped to the back portion of the cavern.

Sim Brattle happened to be in that portion of the den, attending to some of the duties with which he had already become disgusted, and he noticed that the outlaw chief as he passed him had a stealthy look and manner.

Therefore he watched him just as stealthily.

He saw Birch go around a point of rock into a dark corner, where he raised a stone and placed something under it, departing as stealthily as he had came.

The three men went away, well mounted, well armed, and well provided with whisky, which the outlaws seemed to regard as the staff of life.

When they were well out of sight Sim stole back to the place where Birch had made his "cache." He regarded that individual as fair game for himself, and all his doings as worth looking into.

He found the place, raised the stone, and took out a small tin box.

Opening the box, he found it nearly full of unset stones, that sparkled in the faint light that came through the rift. He could not judge of their worth, but was sure that they must be very valuable.

"The time may come when that will be worth

lookin' after," he muttered, as he replaced the box and covered it with the stone.

In the afternoon, when the outlaws in the cavern were dozing after their dinner and drink, and Sim Brattle was again occupied with his disagreeable tasks, a great excitement was caused by the sudden return of Slim Jim, one of the men who had accompanied Birch Corum on his "cruise."

He came in afoot and nearly breathless.

"Birch is took!" he exclaimed. "He and Sam Chelly have both been gobbled!"

Being pressed for particulars, he hastily explained that the party were taking their ease in a ravine, after eating their dinner, when they suddenly found themselves surrounded by a body of men who largely outnumbered them, and who "had the drop" on them. He had escaped at the risk of his life, but Birch and Sam, being "logy" from the liquor they had drank, had been captured and doubtless carried to Santa Clara.

"Come on, boys!" shouted Cimmarone Jce, "there are enough of us left yet to clean out Santa Clara!"

In a very brief space of time the remaining outlaws were armed, mounted and galloping down the mountain-path that led to the cavern.

In the hurry and excitement of the moment it is probable that none of them gave a thought to Sim Brattle. If they had thought of him, it may be supposed that they would have gone off just the same, without taking any notice of him.

The upshot of the flurry was, that the lad found himself free.

More than that—he found within his reach a very valuable package of precious stones, which he could easily carry away.

"I guess I might as well take them to the owner," he said to himself as he turned up the stone and lifted out the tin box.

Not that he knew the owner, or had the least idea of finding him; but a poor excuse is better than none, and he thought that it was right enough to rob the robbers.

He thrust the box into the inner pocket of his vest, and looked about for a pistol; but the outlaws carried all their weapons upon their persons. He stuffed some cold meat into his coat-pocket and left the cavern.

Knowing the route that the riders had taken, he followed it until he had made a considerable descent, and then struck off in another direction. He was not going to get caught by any member of that crowd again, if he could help it.

But he was not long in discovering that he was in quite as bad a predicament as any he had been in yet.

It was one thing to be free, and quite another thing to know what to do with his freedom.

He found himself in a tangle of mountain and valley, ridge and ravine, trees and undergrowth, where there was no road, nor even as much as a bridle-path. He must find a settlement, or before long he would perish of starvation; but he had not the most distant idea what course he ought to pursue to reach the abodes of men. He could judge of the position of the sun pretty fairly, and he had heard that the moss

on the trees would give him a notion of the direction in which north was to be found; but, as he did not know whether he ought to go north or south or east or west, that small amount of knowledge was worth nothing to him.

There was one thing the sun told him—that the day was passing, and it would soon be night. The chances were strongly in favor of his spending that night, at least, alone in the wilderness.

But this is a world of change, and there is no telling what will happen.

As Sim was working his way along the crest of a ridge, a man sprung out from the concealment of a rock, who seized him from behind, pinioning his arms, and threw him on the ground, face first.

This was done so suddenly and unexpectedly that his hands were securely tied before he could begin to struggle for his liberty. Then he was turned over, placed in a sitting posture, and found himself face to face with—Yarrup!

There was no person whom Sim would have been more anxious to avoid than that same Yarrup. He hated the dirty little man, and knew that the feeling was returned with interest. He knew, also, from the grin of devilish satisfaction on his captor's face, that he might expect no mercy at his hands.

"Yere you air ag'in, you young riptyle," said Yarrup, with his mouth spread from ear to ear. "So you've been a-runnin' off in the usooal way. I'd be glad to know how in thunder you contrived to cut loose from that crowd. But you're too sharp to tell, *you air*."

Sim was too sharp to tell, as he saw nothing to be gained by telling, and he kept his tongue between his teeth and his eyes on his questioner.

"Seems like you don't want to talk," resumed Yarrup. "Wal, that ain't no odds. On'y, ef you know anythin' in the way of prayers, you mought as well be a-studyin' of 'em up, 'cause you hain't got long to stay in this world."

Sim said nothing, but looked at his persecutor as if he would be glad to have the job of burying him.

"You ain't sharp enough, though," said Yarrup, "to guess w'ot kind of a larrupin' you're gwine to git. It'll be sech a welthin' as 'll come within' an ace o' skinnin' you alive—that's w'ot it is. Yarrup rhymes with larrup, as I told yer afore, an' now I'll prove it."

"You had better not do that," said Sim, "or I will murder you when I go loose."

"Don't you wish you may get the chance? I ain't gwine to make no half-way job o' this, you young riptyle. When I git through whalin' yer I mean to string w'ot's left up to one o' these trees, an' that'll be a nice mess fur the buzzards. Lemme see—thar's some fine hick'ry switches nigh hand, an' I'll lay in a stock."

Yarrup walked away a little distance, not going out of sight of his victim, cut several strong and lithe hickory wands, and returned, trimming them carefully as he came.

"Lemme see, now," he said, as he looked down at the lad. "I reckon I'll hev to change this young riptyle's hands, an' tie 'em around in front, so's I kin whale him fur all he's wuth."

Loosing his hands gave Sim a chance to strug-

gle, and he availed himself of it. But Yarrup, who was much the stronger, had him at a disadvantage, and soon tied him to suit his notion, but not before the lad had bitten his wrist severely.

"That's another count in the 'dictment," said Yarrup, as he rose to his feet. "You shall pay fur that, too, you p'ison cuss. Now to proceed to business, as the wolf said to the lamb. It's a pity to spile them good clothes o' yourn; but I reckon they kin stand it as well as you kin."

He laid his victim, face downward, on the crest of the ridge, and made one of his hickory whips whistle in the air.

"I wouldn't take a quarter section o' the best land in Colorado fur this bit o' fun," said he.

As Bobby Burns has told us, "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft aglee."

There was a rushing, crushing noise in the adjacent undergrowth, followed by the trampling of heavy feet.

Yarrup dropped his switch, uttered a screech of terror, and fled.

A large, dark and hairy form rushed across Sim Brattle's body, turning him over in its passage.

As he looked in the direction it had taken, he saw Yarrup running away at the top of his speed, pursued by a brown bear.

Sim began at once to strive to secure his own safety.

Bound hand and foot he could only use his elbows and knees to work himself away from the spot; but he used these with all his might, squirming and crawling along the ridge.

But the ridge at that point fell away quite sharply, and Sim in his excitement had crawled too near the edge.

He fell over, and rolled to the bottom, where he lay insensible.

But he soon regained his senses, and discovered, to his great delight, that his hands were free. In tumbling down from the crest of the ridge over the stones and through the scraggy bushes, the string that tied his wrists had been cut or broken. Though he had been sorely cut and bruised in his descent, and his face and body were bleeding and aching, it was joy enough to know that he could use his hands, and he hastened to cut the cord that bound his feet.

The first use he made of his freedom was to pick up his feet and run. It was possible that Yarrup might escape from the bear, and might return to seek his rifle and his victim. It was possible, too, that the bear might come back that way and smell him out. On all accounts the vicinity of the place where he was captured was a good place to get away from.

It was near night, and he could not go far; but he made good use of the time while daylight lasted. When darkness closed in upon him he crawled under a clump of bushes, where, completely exhausted, he fell asleep immediately and slept soundly until daybreak.

When he set out in the morning, he soon came to a brook, where he washed himself and ate his breakfast of cold meat. On reflection he thought that he would do well to follow the course of the stream, as it would be likely to bring him to a settlement."

So, refreshed and hopeful, he went forward again and made good time through the forest.

CHAPTER XIV.

LYNCH LAW.

THE party commanded by Dick Ames rode back toward Santa Clara, Birch Corum and his partner, bound and tied to their horses, being placed in the midst of them. The capture was a great feather in the cap of Santa Clara, and the delegation from that town were loud in their expressions of self-praise. Dick Ames, however, kept a sharp eye on the prisoners, and was by no means sure that they were "out of the woods."

When they were about a mile and a half from Santa Clara he ordered a halt at a point where the road they were following passed through a narrow ravine or canyon.

"What's this for, Cap?" asked Bob Slater.

"There were three men in the party we surprised," replied Dick, "and one of them got away. Of course he hastened to carry the news to the rest of the gang, and it may be that they were not far off. They are a desperate set, as you have cause to know, and the chances are that they will try to get these two out of our hands by attacking us on the way, or by making a raid on Santa Clara to-night. It seems to me that we had better block their game by meeting them where we have a big advantage."

"Your head is level, Cap," said Slater.

Dick sent all the horses and the two prisoners to the lower end of the canyon, leaving Baldy and Bill Yards in charge of the horses, and putting two of his own men on guard over the prisoners, with directions to shoot them rather than allow them to escape. The others he concealed at the head of the ravine, ready to receive the rest of the outlaws if they should follow the trail.

The result proved that he had calculated wisely.

As the sun was setting the clatter of hoofs was heard on the rocky road, and in a few moments the remainder of Blackhawk's band, headed by Cimmarone Joe, came galloping into view.

They were allowed to come within close range, and had almost entered the ravine, when the crack of Dick Ames's rifle gave the signal, and a rattling volley flashed out from behind the rocks and trees.

It made an end of that outlaw organization.

Those who were able to do so checked their horses as soon as possible, and turned and galloped away more rapidly than they had come. Three were left dead in the road, and the others did not get away unhurt.

"That was short and sweet," said Dick Ames, when he had given orders for resuming the march. "Now our rear is safe, as they say in the army, and we need not fear that Santa Clara will be worried by that gang again."

Birch Corum was quite downcast when he learned of the disaster that had befallen his band, and expressed a desire to talk about the terms that had been mentioned to him by Dick Ames; but he was informed that such matters could not be discussed on the march, and he became silent and sullen.

He was safely conveyed to Santa Clara,

where he and his companions were lodged in one of the rooms of Dan Sprawl's hotel. Two armed men were placed in the room with them, and two others at the door. As for the remainder of the citizens of Santa Clara, home had no charms for them, and they prolonged the excitement by making a night of it at the "Happy Home."

Cornelius Corum, who had been very nervous during the absence of the expedition, was rendered still more so by its early return, and soon learned of the capture that had been made.

He expressed no desire to see his son. On the contrary, he seemed to wish to keep as far away from him as possible; but there was one subject upon which he expressed himself freely to young Ames and Bill Yards, when he saw them.

"So you have caught that wicked young man," he said. "I have long been afraid that he would come to some bad end, and now it seems more likely than ever. Did he give up my jewels?"

"I understood him to deny that he knew anything about them," replied Dick.

"Oh, but he does. How can he tell such a lie? Have you searched him?"

"Yes; but we found nothing of the kind on his person."

"He knows where they are. Make him tell where he has hid them."

Dick suggested that Birch Corum did not seem to be the sort of man who could be forced to do anything.

"Offer to let him go free if he will give them up."

But there were others who might have something to say in regard to that matter, and Ames could give the old man no hope.

Birch Corum sent for the young leader, and offered to negotiate for the return of the jewels and the surrender of Sim Brattle, but was informed that all points would have to be settled by the entire body of the men who captured him, and that he would have his trial in the morning.

The bar-room of the "Happy Home," which was also the office and common room of the hotel, was the place appointed for the trial, which was to be conducted in such a manner as the good and lawful citizens present should decide.

News of the capture had gone abroad, and ranchmen came riding in from the adjoining country to witness the proceedings. The room was crowded when Birch Corum and Sam Chelly were brought down, the former stubborn and defiant, and the latter apparently indifferent to the whole business.

Dan Sprawl was elected to serve as judge, and he made an appropriate speech, in which he exhorted the assemblage to preserve the peace of the country and uphold the dignity of Santa Clara; and informed the prisoners that they should have a fair trial.

"That's all we want," said Birch Corum. "If you keep your word, we are bound to go clear."

A jury of twelve men was chosen, half of them from Santa Clara and half from the neighboring country, and Bob Slater volun-

teered to serve as prosecuting attorney. Then Judge Sprawl called for the witnesses.

Dick Ames arose to say a few words.

"Before this trial goes any further," said he, "I would like to make a proposition to the citizens present. The principal prisoner, Birch Corum, was in St. Louis not long ago, and there he stole from his father a valuable package of jewels, which he is supposed to have brought out here. At the same time he brought away from St. Louis a boy named Sim Brattle, in whom I am interested. In fact, it is very important to me, personally, to get possession of that boy. Mr. Cornelius Corum is now in Santa Clara, and I understand that he offers a reward of one thousand dollars for the recovery of the jewels. I can guarantee as much as that for the return of the boy. The question is whether, in consideration of those rewards, you will let Birch Corum go free, on condition that he shows us where to find the jewels and the boy, and promises to go away from this part of the country and stay away. I ask that this proposition be put to a vote."

"Before puttin' that p'int to a vote," said Judge Sprawl, "we had better hear what the prisoner has to say about it. Maybe he moughtn't accept those terms."

Birch Corum rose to answer.

"As far as anything that happened in St. Louis is concerned," said he, "it is clearly beyond the jurisdiction of this crowd that calls itself a court. If I have brought any jewels out here, that is a matter between me and the man who has come after them. As for that boy, I admit that he came with me from St. Louis, and he was glad to come. He is well and safe, and anybody who wants him is welcome to him. I don't admit any sort of guilt, but, to save trouble, I am willing to accept the proposition that has just been made, and to carry it out in good faith."

Bob Slater rose to reply.

The substance of his remarks was that he was opposed to every kind of bargain and sale in a court of justice, such as he supposed that court to be. The proposition of Captain Ames, though well meant, was against law—clearly against law—and ought not to be listened to. More than that—and here the orator brought his fist down forcibly upon a box—it was against the dignity of Santa Clara. The prisoner, if he was the man they believed him to be, had not only been repeatedly guilty of robbery and murder, but had lately offered the people of Santa Clara, and the town which they had known and loved so long and so well—here the speaker became pathetic—a deadly insult. His crimes, among which that insult should be counted, called for the severest and promptest punishment, and the speaker hoped that the citizens present would do their duty, as men who had feelings to protect, as well as lives and property.

Bob Slater's speech carried the crowd. The proposition made by Dick Ames was put to a vote, and was rejected by a large majority, Santa Clara voting solidly against it.

Witnesses were again called for, and here a serious difficulty presented itself. There was no person who could identify Birch Corum as

the leader of the band that was known as Blackhawk's gang, and Sam Chelly as a member of that gang. Nobody had the slightest doubt that they were what they were charged with being; but positive proof is imperatively demanded by the American mind, especially when there is a jury to pass upon it. No positive proof was forthcoming. The members of the band had always been masked when they carried on their plundering operations, and the face of their leader, in particular, had never been seen. It was an accepted belief that Blackhawk and Birch Corum were the same person; but, after all a belief is not a fact.

After Bob Slater had called several witnesses, who could only testify to their belief, he got angry.

"What's the use o' foolin'?" he asked. "Everybody knows who and what these men are, and what everybody knows is evidence enough for us."

"I ain't so sure of that, Bob," said Judge Sprawl. "It is our duty to git at the facts by legal proof, and there must be somebody about yere who kin say that Birch Corum is Blackhawk, and the leader of Blackhawk's gang."

"I can," said a faint but resolute voice, and the crowd parted to make way for this new witness.

It was a boy, whose clothing bore evidence of rough usage in the woods and hills, and whose face was pale and scarred. He was almost breathless from exhaustion.

"It is Sim Brattle!" exclaimed Bill Yards, as he pushed forward to greet his friend; and Birch Corum opened his eyes wide as he saw the "young rattler."

"Hooray! We're all right now!" shouted Bill Yards, and tears of joy came into his eyes as he squeezed the hand of his "pardner."

Sim was given a seat, and, after he had rested a little, was requested to tell his story.

His evidence was just what was wanted. He knew that Birch Corum was Blackhawk, because that individual had told him so in St. Louis, and had boasted of the fact. He had been a prisoner in the mountain den of Blackhawk's band, and had seen Birch Corum there, acting and recognized as their leader. He had also seen Sam Chelly there.

"Hev you got any spite ag'inst Birch Corum, youngster?" asked Judge Sprawl. "He has gi'n me to understand that he treated you well, and left you safe and sound."

"Did he, though?" replied Sim. "It's no thanks to him that I'm here and alive. He was for havin' me strangled or knocked in the head—anythin' to git rid of me."

As soon as the lad had finished giving his testimony, Dick Ames and Bill Yards, who had ceased to take a lively interest in the trial, hurried him off to the kitchen of the "Happy Home," where they provided him with refreshments, and made him tell his story with fuller details.

The tale was not completed, when they heard the noise of the Santa Clara crowd. The jury had easily agreed upon its verdict, and the crowd had gone out to execute the judgment of the court, and had returned to moisten their parched throats.

When the three friends entered the bar-room they found Dan Sprawl politely and sympathetically informing Cornelius Corum of the sudden death of his only son.

"Did he give up my package of jewels?" asked the old man.

"Nary give up," replied Sprawl.

"Then you have murdered him. You should have given the poor boy a chance. If he had had a chance, he might have told you where to find my property."

"What would you give for that bit of property, mister?" asked Sim Brattle.

"I offered a thousand dollars," replied the old man, "for their return and the conviction of the thief; but now, under the circumstances—"

"One thousand ducats is what you can git 'em for, and not a cent less," said Sim, producing the tin box he had brought from the cavern.

"God bless you, my son! Give them to me, and I will pay you in St. Louis."

"Cash down, or no trade."

Cash down it was, and Cornelius Corum secured his precious box of jewels.

"So that wicked young man has really been banged," he said. "Well, I was sure there would be an Indian war or something of the kind. Dear me! he is the only member of my family who ever went off that way."

"His father will be likely to go off the same way," remarked Dan Sprawl, "if he don't make tracks for St. Louis and stay there close."

The old man took the hint.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TANGLE UNTWISTED.

MR. AND MRS. AUGUSTUS AMES were seated in the "palatial mansion" of which Sim Brattle had boasted to his friend, discussing their position and prospects.

"There is nothing more to worry us, my love," said he. "The report of the referee will be confirmed by the Probate Court to-morrow, and we will have a good addition to our income for six years at least, and we need not look ahead any further at the present."

"For that," she said, "we may thank your sharpness and forethought in securing the boy who so strongly resembled our dear Arthur, and using him as you did."

"We must also thank your courage and decision of character, my love. I must confess that the boy was a little too sharp for me; but you knew how to deal with him. When we found him on our hands, and he persisted in his determination to stick, as he said, I really did not know how I was going to get out of the scrape. But you came to the rescue, and quietly put him out of the way."

"Far enough out of the way too," said Mrs. Ames. "I do not think there is any danger of his coming back to bother us."

The door bell rung, and a servant announced the visitor as Mr. Richard Ames.

"That poverty-stricken nephew of mine," said Augustus Ames. "Really, now, I do not take the least interest in my brother's good-for-nothing family, and they have no right to bother me."

"You had better see him," suggested Mrs. Ames.

"I suppose he wants to borrow money."

"If he does, you need not lend it to him. We can treat him coolly, and soon get rid of him. Show him in, Kate."

Mr. Richard Ames did not have the appearance of a person who wanted to borrow money. He was well dressed, healthy and hearty, and seemed to be well fed and well to do.

"Dear me, Richard!" said Mr. Augustus Ames. "I would not have known you. Why have you kept away from us so long?"

"You gave me no special inducement to visit you," replied Dick. "At least, there was no invitation."

"I supposed that you were sore about your uncle's will; but I hope you have got over that unpleasant feeling."

"It does not worry me at all, sir. I hope you are satisfied."

"Quite so, Richard. I have had a sufficient allowance ordered for our dear Arthur until he comes of age. That is, the order will be made to-morrow. Are you engaged in any business?"

"I have been managing a sheep farm in Colorado during the past two years, and am reasonably prosperous. Speaking of Arthur, sir, I called to ask you whether you have heard from him lately."

"Not for a week or so," replied Mr. Ames, and his answer was strictly within the limits of truth.

"Where is he now?"

"I sent him westward, on a little trip, for the sake of his health, which was rather delicate."

"I called to ask you about him," said Dick, "because some news I have brought from Colorado is highly important, if it should prove to be true."

"What news is that, Richard?" asked Mr. Ames, who was seriously alarmed by his nephew's words and manner.

"Just before I left there I heard of the sudden death of a young fellow named Arthur Ames. At least, he passed by the name of Arthur Ames, and gave that as his name before he died. I was spoken to about him on the supposition that he might be a relative of mine."

Augustus Ames's face grew brighter. If the boy who had been sent away in charge of Birch Corum was dead, there was surely nothing more to bother him.

"Your news cannot be true," he said. "If Arthur had died, I'd have heard of his death before now from the person who had charge of him."

"But the boy went by the name of Arthur Ames," Dick insisted.

"I hope, Richard—though I am sorry to be obliged to make such an insinuation—I do really hope that you are not prompted in this matter by a desire to get possession of your cousin Arthur's property."

"I have never given any evidence of such a desire," replied Dick.

"The wish is often father to the thought," severely remarked Mr. Ames.

"You may take it as you please, sir; but it

is actually my belief that my cousin Arthur Ames is dead."

"That is enough, young man. I understand your motive now, and I assure you that you will not be able to practice any imposition upon me. This interview is at an end."

Augustus Ames rose indignantly, and just then the door bell rung again.

The servant announced two boys who wished to see Mr. Ames.

That gentleman and his wife looked at each other, and hesitated. But they need not have hesitated, as the two boys had followed the servant closely, and Sim Brattle and Bill Yards boldly entered the room.

Mr. Ames was dismayed and dumfounded. He did not know what to do or to say. That pest of a boy was not dead, but had returned to St. Louis, and all his plans were spoiled and his fine prospects ruined.

His wife, however, was equal to the occasion.

She stepped forward, with a smiling face, extending both her hands to Sim.

"Here is our dear Arthur!" she exclaimed. "What brought you home so soon, my precious? Your cousin Richard has been frightening us with a sad story of your death."

Sim laid his forefinger against the side of his nose, and looked up at her knowingly.

"That won't work, old lady," he remarked.

"Why, my dear Arthur, what do you mean?"

"I mean that I don't trust any fat woman again in this world of sin and sorrow—not much. That dear Arthur business has gone glimmerin' as the poet says. You shut down on it a little too sharp, and it's played. You don't ketch this bird twice with the same chaff."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "has the boy gone crazy?"

"Not this time," replied Sim. "My head took a twist a while ago; but it is level enough now. I've come out of the kinks, and am goin' in for a square deal."

"That's the ticket for soup, Simuel," remarked Bill Yards.

Mrs. Ames was fairly at her wit's end.

"Do you understand this, Augustus?" she asked. "I am quite bewildered."

"He understands it well enough," said Dick. "He understands that my cousin Arthur Ames died some time since, and that he used this boy, Sim Brattle, to practice an imposition upon the next heirs. He understands that Sim Brattle was then kidnapped and put out of the way in such a manner as was likely to lead to his death. He understands that his swindling scheme has been discovered and can be easily exposed, and that you are both in danger of the penitentiary. Do you think you had better apply to the Probate Court for that order tomorrow, Mr. Augustus Ames?"

Mr. Augustus Ames said nothing.

"Instead of doing that, you had better come with your lawyer to meet Mr. Brennan in the morning, to make arrangements for settling your accounts and turning over the estate to the rightful heirs. And I want you to understand that no compromise will be allowed. You must pay up in full, or be treated as a criminal. Come, boys; let us go home."

An hour afterward Dick Ames and the two boys were at supper in his mother's house. The faces of all were bright and cheerful.

"I am sure," said Amy, "that Sim would never have thought of doing such a thing if he could have supposed that we would be harmed by it."

"Of course I wouldn't," replied Sim. "It was only a lark anyhow. But I am glad I got a chance to make it hot for that fat woman on Chouteau avenue."

"If it had not been for your 'lark'," said Mrs. Ames, "it might have been a long time before we learned how we were being swindled. I am glad that you are here safe and well, and I would like to know what you two boys think of doing now."

"Captain Dick has got to go back to the ranch afore long to settle up things," said Bill, "and he says that I may go with him."

"As I've got a thousand dollars cash capital," said Sim, "I believe I will go out there too, and grow up with the country."

THE END.

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